

**Can Party Governance Endure
in the U.S. House of Representatives?
A Personal Essay
By Donald R. Wolfensberger
A Congress Project 120th Anniversary Roundtable
on Woodrow Wilson's *Congressional Government*
Monday, November 14, 2005**

I was first introduced to Woodrow Wilson's 1885 treatise, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics*, as a graduate student in political science at the University of Iowa in the mid-1960s. That same course also included on its reading list *Congressional Government's* contemporary counterpart, James MacGregor Burns's *Deadlock of Democracy: Four Party Politics in America* (1963), and Alexander and Juliette George's psycho-biography of Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (1964).

I bundled my findings and opinions from these and other readings into a review essay titled (as I recall it), "James MacGregor Burns's *Deadlock of Democracy* and Anglophilia in American Politics ." In the paper I traced the love affair many political scientists have had over the years with Wilson's idealized notion of transplanting a British-like parliamentary system in American soil. Most notable among these was the report of the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association in 1950 titled, "Toward a More Responsible Two Party System."¹

I concluded in my review essay that any such transplant attempt would never take root and flourish here because our constitutional soil and evolving political environment were quite different from Britain's, notwithstanding similar institutional traits. The reason the transplant would not take, I argued, was that our constitutional system of representative government was based, first and foremost, on the geographic representation of the people, whereas the British parliamentary system was based primarily on the representation of political parties, with constituency representation a secondary concern. The American people would not long stand for taking a back seat to any political party, no matter how lofty and noble its principles or goals. Our Constitution makes quite clear up-front in the Preamble who is in the driver's seat of our governmental apparatus: It is "We the people of the United States," not "we the parties."

From my personal, political perspective as a Republican, I was appalled at the extent to which President Lyndon Baines Johnson was dominating the Congress and diminishing its independent role as a co-equal branch of government. That was too much party government for me.

Now, flash forward 30 years, from my 1965-66 graduate school days to 1995 when I found myself working as the majority party's chief-of-staff of the House Rules Committee under its chairman, Gerald B.H. Solomon (R-N.Y.), and the newly elected speaker, Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.). The change in party control of Congress was so dramatic and even foreign that Gingrich was being hailed by some in the media as the new "prime minister" of American government. President Bill Clinton was, at least temporarily, left sulking in the wings, protesting to whatever media representatives were still paying attention to him, that he was not irrelevant.

Far from renouncing the mantle of premier thrust upon him, Gingrich was reveling in his new-found fame and acclaim as the *de facto* head of government. He was a party man, through and through, and a deep believer in responsible party government as championed by Woodrow Wilson. The *Contract With America*, which Gingrich conceived (along with House Republican Conference Chairman Dick Arme), was not just a party manifesto and campaign platform, but a governing document. While the 1994 GOP document did not gain unanimous support from all House Republican candidates, either when it was unveiled or when its ten legislative planks were later voted, it was still a reasonable facsimile of party government in action—party unity, discipline, clearly enunciated goals and programs, and a strong central leader.

Was this cohesive new majority party regime in 1995 a clear repudiation of my earlier thesis about the hostility of the American polity to party rule? Not really. My reading of history recognized that there were periods in our history when parties ruled in Congress with an iron fist, most notably between 1890 and 1910 under Republican Speakers Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine and Joseph Gurney Cannon of Illinois-- the 'Czar Speaker' period. That was an amazing two decade run for *party governance* in the House but, as I will argue below, it was not party government in the parliamentary sense of a unified legislative and executive under a single leader. Gingrich may have been a strong leader of the House, but he did not lead the Republican Senate, let alone the Democratic president. As he would later admit of the breakdown of his juggernaut in late 1995, "We had not only failed to take into account the ability of the Senate to delay us and obstruct us, but we had much too cavalierly underrated the power of the President."²

The same can be said for the powerful speakerships of Reed and Cannon, even when they had a president of their own party in the White House.³ They neither led both branches of

government nor were they totally led by their party's presidents. The legislative presidency had not yet arrived, and the Congresses of this era were not proactive when it came to new legislative programs, except, perhaps, on the tariff issue.⁴

Throughout our history, Democrats were much less cohesive and party-oriented because of the regional and ideological differences that coexisted under their fragile, New Deal Coalition of northern liberals and southern conservatives. However, in some ways they more nearly approximated the true party government model of the Executive and Legislative branches under unified leadership, working in tandem to implement the party's policies and programs into law, if only for brief and sporadic periods. For most of the twentieth century, that has meant presidential leadership of Congress—a president willing to take the legislative initiative and bind together his diverse partisans on the Hill into a working, majority coalition, united behind a clear set of party agenda items.

We saw this with President Woodrow Wilson and his New Freedom legislation in 1913-14, working through Democratic party- and committee caucuses; with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal program—especially during the famous “hundred days” (the model for Gingrich's 100-day Contract period); and with President Lyndon Baines Johnson's Great Society civil rights and anti-poverty programs in 1964-66. We did not see it so much with either presidents Carter or Clinton, in part because both were moderate southern Democrats (Clinton called himself a “new Democrat”), and the majority caucus in Congress was more traditional, New Deal-liberal.

In each of the above-cited instances in which party government did operate, however, it was not sustained beyond two or three years at the most. In fact, it has become conventional wisdom nowadays that new presidents have a very limited window of opportunity of six-months to a year or two in which to enact whatever priority programs they consider to be part of their electoral mandate (the so-called “honeymoon period”)—even when both houses of Congress are controlled by their own party. We speak of this latter situation as “unified party government” because the same party is at least nominally in charge of both houses of Congress plus the White House. But this does not necessarily translate, at least for long, to a parliamentary-style party government in which the legislative and executive powers are truly unified as “the government” and the party's government ministers and Members of Parliament rise or fall in lock-step.

As I argued in my graduate essay, after brief spurts of unified action by a president and Congress, the Congress has historically reverted to its more traditional role of being a representative body in which constituents are paramount. This is because a member's reelection depends more on constituent service and approval than on party loyalty, promises, and policies—let alone on the fate or popularity of a particular president. If anything, blind party loyalty is bound, from time to time, to bump up against contrary constituency pressures and interests and jeopardize members' reelection goals. If asked whether they put party, president, or the nation first, most members would answer, “the nation,” by which they really mean that representative cross-section of citizens found in their congressional districts.

House Parties in the 1960s and 1970s

I first came to Capitol Hill as an intern between my two years of graduate school in the summer of 1965, working for my congressman, John B. Anderson of Illinois. What I witnessed in the Republican party in the House was a great deal of ferment. Republicans had ousted their minority leader, Charlie Halleck of Indiana (after Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory over Republican Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona in the 1964 presidential elections) and replaced him with Gerald R. Ford of Michigan. Junior House members had also been elevated to other leadership positions beginning in 1963.

Moreover, Republicans were preparing a set of legislative alternatives to LBJ's Great Society. They dubbed this effort, “Republican Constructive Alternative Programs” (the acronym for which Democrats rearranged to read: CRAP). The GOP in Congress was also putting together a book on the need for far-reaching reform of the Congress coinciding with the ongoing hearings and deliberations of a bipartisan and bicameral reform committee (the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress).⁵ I had followed the committee's hearings closely as an intern and helped prepare Anderson's testimony before it as well as a chapter for the GOP reform book.

In short, it was a period of intense partisan activity and ferment on the Hill. Democrats were acting as a party in rallying behind their president and his Great Society programs, and Republicans were fulfilling their party role as the Loyal Opposition, albeit with constructive alternatives.

When I returned full time to Congress in 1969 as a legislative assistant for Anderson, the political scene had changed considerably. Control of the Executive Branch had switched to the

Republicans under President Richard M. Nixon, though Democrats still controlled both houses of Congress. Now Democrats were the Loyal Opposition and Republicans were expected to support the programs and policies of their president, who as it turned out, was far from passive.

On the congressional reform front, the original Legislative Reorganization Act 1965, the product of a bipartisan, bicameral joint committee, had still not passed both houses, though it had been jump-started in the House where it was being rewritten by the Rules Committee to allay concerns of some committee chairmen. When the bill reached the House floor, reform-minded Republicans forged an alliance with Democratic members of the Democratic Study Group (DSG), to push through amendments that expanded the transparency and accountability aspects of the measure. These included permitting recorded votes on floor amendments in the Committee of the Whole, making it more difficult to close committee meetings and hearings, and making committee roll call votes available for public inspection.

The overall thrust of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 was not only to modernize the Congress, but ensure greater openness, fairness, and majority rule, especially in House committees. A “committee bill of rights” was included in the bill that helped ensure that a recalcitrant chairman could no longer unilaterally prevent a committee majority from working its will on legislation it favored.

The DSG had long been interested in breaking the hold of conservative southern committee chairmen on the system. The chairmen had repeatedly thwarted much of the liberals’ domestic policy agenda in the fifties and early sixties--even bottling up much of President John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier legislation in 1961-63. The DSG critique of the committee system was very similar to that of Woodrow Wilson in *Congressional Government* when he wrote, “I know not how better to describe our form of government in a single phrase than by calling it a government by the chairman of the Standing Committees,” a “disintegrate ministry” made up of “the elders of the assembly,” and “constituted of selfish and warring elements.” The House of Representatives, Wilson wrote, was composed of “the dissociated heads of forty eight ‘little legislatures,’” with the Speaker relegated to being its chief judicial officer instead of its chief political officer.⁶

The main problem with “committee government” said Wilson, was that “debate is without aim because legislation is without consistency....The absence of any concert of action amongst the

Committees leaves legislation with scarcely any trace of determinate party courses.”⁷ The fact that both parties are represented on committees “makes party responsibility indistinct and organized party action almost impossible....Under such circumstances, neither the failure nor the success of any policy inaugurated by one of the Committees can fairly be charged to the account of either party.” Finally, this lack of party accountability made it difficult for voters to determine how to assess credit or blame at the polls.⁸

The DSG forces during the reform era of the 1960s and ‘70s, in addition to their work on the legislative reorganization act, were working simultaneously to change Democratic Caucus rules to attain their objectives. In 1973 they succeeded in dismantling the seniority system by allowing for separate Caucus votes on nominees for committee chairs. Moreover, they instituted a subcommittee bill of rights through caucus rules that made subcommittee chairmen partially autonomous from the dictates of full committee chairmen. The upshot of their successful efforts was to break down the power of full committee chairmen while elevating the status of subcommittee chairs who were more junior and more liberal. “Committee government” gave way to “subcommittee government” which some saw as being even more fragmentary and unaccountable.

The solution to this conundrum was to strengthen party leadership so it could help pull all the disparate threads back together prior to floor action on legislation—something the reformers say they had in mind all along. The reason it was not effected sooner was that the leaders they chose were unwilling to exercise the full measure of leadership powers that a majority of their followers claim they were ready to cede. The godfather or guru of the congressional reform revolution of the seventies was Richard Bolling (D-Mo.) who had written two books in the 1960s laying out his prescription for reforming the institution.⁹ In addition to legislative reorganization and ethics reforms, Bolling advocated that changes be made in the majority party caucus to erect a new kind of party leadership, building on lessons of the past. “There is no suggestion that there be a return to ‘King Caucus’ or ‘Czar Speaker,’” Bolling wrote. “Surely there is no reason, however, why a distillation, impervious to abuses, of the best in the historical caucus and the best in the historical speakership cannot be made.”¹⁰

Bolling was merely echoing Wilson who wrote in *Congressional Government* that, “The caucus is meant as an anti-dote to the Committees” and “to supply the cohesive principle which the

multiplicity and mutual independence of the Committees so powerfully destroy.”¹¹ And, at another point, Wilson recognizes that the Speaker “uses his powers as freely and imperatively as he is expected to use them. He unhesitatingly acts as the legislative chief of his party, organizing the Committees in the interest of this or that policy,” and facilitating “their control of the business of the House” through his power of recognition during debate.¹² It was these two power sources, the party caucus and the Speakership, that Bolling wished to combine for effective party governance.

Specifically, Bolling suggested that the party leader in the House, whether the Speaker or minority leader, be “the operating head of the legislative apparatus” where “his power would be observable and responsible and, therefore, accountable.” The Speaker (or minority leader) would nominate all members and the chairmen of the Rules and Ways and Means committee, subject to Caucus approval. The Ways and Means Democratic members would remain the party’s committee on committees and nominate all members to other committees, subject to caucus approval, but the Speaker would then nominate the chairmen of each of the other committees.

This was the best way, Bolling said, to ensure both party discipline and accountability. “It would be undesirable to impose the kind of party discipline which has been the rule in the modern British Parliament....Dissent must not be stifled in the Democratic Party....This country is too large and diverse to attempt to homogenize either party.”¹³ Nevertheless, Bolling still favored retaining the caucus rule that allowed its members to bind Members’ floor votes: “There would be no change in the requirement that a two-thirds vote is required to bind members on issues.” As he went on to point out, the rule allows Members to disregard the instructions if they announce at the time they believe the proposal is contrary to the Constitution or is contrary to a commitment members made to their constituents in the last election.¹⁴

Bolling was careful in the wake of Lyndon Johnson’s masterful success in pushing his programs through Congress with maximum speed and efficiency to avoid calling for a parliamentary style system in which the executive would dominate the legislators: “There is no implication here that the Democrats be a ‘rubber stamp’ for a Democratic president. It would be expected that the two would be on better than speaking terms.” But there would be no reason Democrats could not review the president’s proposals in their caucus and assign priorities to various items.¹⁵

Little could Bolling realize in the late 1960s that his idea of revitalizing the party caucus,

in partnership with the Speaker, would come back to haunt him in the mid-1970s and be the demise of his own institutional reform proposals. Bolling co-chaired a bipartisan Select Committee on Committees in the 93rd Congress (1973-74) that was charged with recommending changes in House committee jurisdictions. Its final report provoked the wrath of powerful committee chairmen whose jurisdictional bailiwicks would be messed with. The reform package was side-tracked to a Democratic Caucus study committee for several months.

My boss, John Anderson, who happened to be chairman of the House Republican Conference, undertook a series of one-minute floor speeches, capped by a one-hour special order speech, denouncing the re-emergence of “King Caucus.”¹⁶ Anderson’s attack on the Democratic Caucus culminated in his offering an unsuccessful question of privilege resolution on the House floor that would have require Bolling to seek floor clearance from the Rules Committee for his committee reform resolution.¹⁷ By the time Bolling’s reform resolution did reach the floor toward the end of the Congress, the Democratic Caucus had developed its own watered down alternative that left most committee jurisdictions virtually intact. The substitute succeeded and destroyed any hopes Bolling had for better aligning committees in a more equitable and rational manner.

The revitalized and activist Democratic Caucus reached its peak the following year, 1975, under its new chairman, Phil Burton (D-Calif.) when it instructed Rules Committee Democrats to make in order an oil depletion allowance repealer to a tax rebate bill, and adopted a sense of the caucus resolution calling for a termination of all assistance for military operations in Vietnam and Cambodia. The latter action so inflamed a number of conservative Democrats that the leadership began passing the word that the Caucus should only be used for procedural matters or for determining policy of overriding national importance. International Relations Committee Chairman Thomas “Doc” Morgan (D-Pa.) was especially upset that the caucus vote was taken before his committee could even consider President Ford’s request for supplemental funds for the military. “If this is the way we’re going to operate,” Morgan said, “let’s abolish the committee system, open up the caucus and call witnesses.”¹⁸

Another member questioning the caucus rule was Representative Joseph L. Fisher (D-Va.) who, in a meeting with reporters, suggested the caucus had overstepped its bounds in attempting to determine substantive legislative polices. “We’ve had our revolution, and maybe we oughtn’t go too

far. My fear is that if new members keep going to the caucus, more and more people are going to get their backs up.” Fisher even wrote a letter to the editor of the Washington Post that was published on March 26, 1974, in which he said, in part, “The Caucus should not be used for a referendum every week or two when 50 members don’t like what aa committee seems to be doing. This is an appeal to King Caucus....”¹⁹

Rep. Bill Chappell (D-Fla.) subsequently circulated a letter in late March calling for opening the Democratic Caucus to the public. He soon got enough signatures (over fifty) to make the proposal an item for the caucus agenda. As a prod to Democrats, House Republicans voted to open their conference to the public on April 29. The Democrats finally followed suit on September 9 to open up their party meetings. At the same time, the Caucus voted to abolish their rule that bound members floor votes if two-thirds of the caucus voted to do so. Left untouched, though, was the ability of a majority of the caucus to bind members’ committee votes. The final nail was driven into the coffin of King Caucus on November 19, 1975, when conservatives pushed through a motion directing the Judiciary Committee to report an anti-school-busing Constitutional amendment by a vote of 172 to 96. Both parties eventually dropped the open caucus rule because few members bothered to attend the meetings.²⁰

Rep. Bob Carr (D-Mich.) reflected in a 1983 interview with *Congressional Quarterly* that it wasn’t the complaints about ‘King Caucus’ occasioned by the votes on military assistance to Vietnam and Cambodia that killed the caucus, but rather the opening of its meetings to the public. Rep. Tom Foley, who chaired the Democratic Caucus during its quiet years, 1976-80, agreed that the open caucus rule destroyed the body’s effectiveness as a “family council,” but added that the attempts to dictate policy by votes in the caucus had strained its institutional structure and created skewed results. “It should never make collective judgments for the party,” he said. “We left that role several years ago and we’re never going back.”²¹

Party Caucuses in the Post-Reform House

The sleeping giant of the Democratic (if not the King) was reawakened with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 after a four-year hiatus with Democratic President Jimmy Carter in the White House. Rep. Gillis Long (D-La.) became the new Caucus chairman and set about making it an active organization in cooperation with and approval of other Democratic leaders. He established

a 36 member Committee on Democratic Effectiveness to explore ways to strengthen the Democratic Party. Its most notable accomplishment was producing a report, “Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity” (known as the “Yellow Brick Road” given the color of its cover). Long also surveyed caucus members to help build a consensus on the fiscal 1984 budget resolution. Finally, the Caucus was given authority to send 164 unpledged members to the Democratic Convention in 1984, and Caucus Secretary, Rep. Geraldine Ferraro (D-N.Y.) chaired the Platform Committee.

The drubbing Democrats took in the 1984 elections led to an even more active Caucus in 1985 under its new chairman, Rep. Dick Gephardt (D-Mo.). Once again the Caucus began discussing and even voting on substantive policy issues like sanctions on South Africa and trade matters, though no attempt was made to bind committee votes. A Caucus subcommittee under Rep. Don Bonker even drafted a trade bill, somewhat reminiscent of the way the Underwood tariff bill was developed in 1913. When the Caucus did adopt a resolution instructing the Rules Committee to make in order a specific Democratic amendment to a campaign finance bill, Rules Committee chairman Claude Pepper (D-Fla.) took the approach Rep. Bolling had taken when he was chairman: “The Rules Committee is bound by the rules of the House, not by the rules of the Caucus.” Nevertheless, the Rules Committee made in order the amendment in question as a matter of “comity” to the Caucus.²²

The election of Rep. Jim Wright (D-Tex.) as House Speaker in 1987 saw the brief return of what Republicans would call ‘Czar Speaker.’ Wright was impatient in getting legislative results, and resorted to numerous shortcuts to build a record of legislative accomplishments for his party, often without consultation with other party leaders or members. Backbencher Newt Gingrich warned at the time that, if left to his own devices, Wright could become the most powerful Speaker ever (which helps explain why Gingrich set off on a one-man crusade to bring Wright down by filing ethics charges). Wright resigned from the House in June 1989 while facing other ethics charges brought against him by the bipartisan ethics committee (though none of Gingrich’s filed charges stuck). Wright’s successor, Rep. Tom Foley (D-Wash.) was much more low key in his approach to party actions, though the whip organization remained an active command center for party discussions.

It is fair to say that both parties pursued a similar path in the post-reform era of shared responsibilities among elected party leaders and the caucus, and that committees continued to lose their power and importance as party strength increased. Today, both parties tend to hold weekly

caucus meetings at which important policy and political matters are discussed. The party leaders use these sessions to take the temperatures of their members and make course adjustments accordingly. Members of both parties have come to accept the powers they have delegated to their leadership to set the legislative agenda and take steps necessary to ensure the policy positions of the party are adopted (in the case of the majority), or given fair exposure and a vote (in the case of the minority).

Party Governance, Minority Party Critiques, and Deliberative Democracy

Given Woodrow Wilson's faith in party government as the best means of elevating public discourse and enlightening public opinion, it is perhaps ironic that one of the main criticisms of party governance as we know it today is that it stifles genuine deliberation and diminishes democratic dialogue—the kind of competition and exchange of ideas and views that would truly engage and inform the people on the problems, policies, and processes of their government.

During my work with minority Republicans our criticism of the Democratically controlled House in the 1980s and 1990s was that party leadership was increasingly usurping the role of committees and thereby pre-empting the deliberative character of the system which relies on “a reasoning together about the nature of a problem and solutions to it.”²³

If committees are more driven by partisan policy dictates and electoral concerns, they are less likely to work together to develop consensus legislation based on the best evidence on the nature of a problem and the most well thought-out and effective solutions. Our critique went on to criticize the Democratic majority's practice of severely restricting the floor amendment process on bills of importance to their party—a further undermining of deliberative democracy, as we saw it.

In March 1993, in response to a string of restrictive rules from the Rules Committee, the Republican Leadership appointed my boss, Gerald B. Solomon (R-N.Y.), ranking Republican on the Rules Committee, to head up a Task Force on Restrictive Rules. Solomon named me task force staff director. The Task Force proceeded to rename itself, the “Republican Leadership Task Force on Deliberative Democracy.” On April 21 the task force issued the “First Report of the House Democracy Project,” titled, “The Decline of Deliberative Democracy in the House.” The report documented the extent of rules abuses by the Democrats both in committees and on the floor.

The Republican Conference accepted the report and approved the task force's plan to press

a full court public relations offensive in the House and on the floor to highlight Democratic abuses of power. About two weeks later, the Democratic Rules Committee issued its first open rule of the 103rd Congress. The Republican PR offensive continued for the duration of the Congress.²⁴

In 1994, I coauthored an article for the *Harvard Journal on Legislation* with Solomon titled, “The Decline of Deliberative Democracy in the House and Proposals for Reform,” highlighting the history of power shifts in the House, the contemporary House’s majority leadership control and abuse of deliberative process, and proposals pending in the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress to improve the institution.²⁵

The upshot of all this was that Democrats still reported the most restrictive rules ever in the 103rd Congress (70% of all rules, by Republicans’ definition). Proposals for reform by the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress died in the House Rules Committee when Speaker Tom Foley pulled the plug on the bill in the middle of committee markup. However, when Republicans took control of the House the following year (1995), they instituted many of the same reform proposals (and others) on the opening day of the 104th Congress, and, during the course of that Congress they raised the percentage of “open and modified-open rules from 44 under the Democrats to 58 percent under the new Republican majority (and its revised definition of openness).

As history (or George Orwell in *Animal Farm*) tells us, all revolutions have a short half-life, and the Republican revolution soon enough settled down to the nitty-gritty business of governing, i.e., putting together sufficient votes to pass the majority party’s legislative agenda. By 2005, the tenth anniversary of the Republican takeover of the House, it was the minority House Democrats who were issuing their own report on majority abuses of power this time titled, “Broken Promises: The Death of Deliberative Democracy.” By the Democrats’ count of special rules in the 108th Congress (2003-04) Republicans had reported just 28 open rules out of 128, meaning that 100 rules, or 78 percent of the total rules, placed restrictions on the floor amendment process. The report borrowed heavily from the 1993 report of the Republican Task Force, juxtaposing criticisms and promises then with the reality of the 108th Congress.²⁶

Perhaps too much emphasis is put on the floor amendment process as a measure of whether deliberation is taking place. As Steven S. Smith reminds us, floor debates are just that, an exchange of arguments for or against a particular policy solution, which is only the final step of deliberation.

Members are not actually reasoning on the floor about the nature of the problem, let alone devising and debating possible alternatives for solving it. The reporting committee has presumably done most of that heavy lifting.²⁷

In fairness, both minority Republicans in the 1990s and minority Democrats today have also emphasized what they see as the breakdown of a fair and deliberative committee process as a central factor in the decline of deliberative democracy. The amendment situation on the floor is simply a symptom of that breakdown, a recognition that committees are not as able to defend their products as they were when they were consensus-driven bills developed by members of both parties after considerable amounts of information gathering, problem analysis, and discussion of alternative solutions. Party-directed policy solutions are unlikely to have the same thorough scrutiny or discussion in committee, and party leadership is less inclined to allow those solutions to be challenged by floor amendments. Because both parties have more invested in their policy solutions than would be the case with bipartisan legislation reported by a committee, they prefer to have the floor decisions limited to basically two alternatives: the majority party bill versus the minority party substitute.

Conclusions

My own views on the role of parties in Congress evolved as my tenure there increased. My original antipathy toward party government dissipated somewhat as I saw the necessity of holding party members together on commonly held policy positions and electoral goals. At the same time, I came to appreciate more the difference between “party government” and “party governance.” The former implied a rigid, top-down control (often from the White House during periods of unified party government), that included dictating substantive legislative details and the procedural devices necessary to ensure their passage. The involvement of the party leadership in the details of legislation could be troubling, especially when it runs contrary to what might emerge from a committee as a result of bipartisan deliberation and consensus.

Yet, I understood that the role of party leaders is to draw lines of distinction with the opposition party, and not to blur those lines by compromising with it. This is what Wilson was talking about in *Congressional Government* and presumably what would make our system more accountable and understandable by the general citizenry.

The question remains, though, as to how much is lost if party governance substantially supplants committee government. To what extent does deliberative democracy suffer, and is it worth the price? Is committee membership and the development of issue expertise devalued in the process and, if so, how does this affect the quality of legislation and the solutions proposed therein? Finally, to what extent does party leadership dominance tend to acquiesce to special interest pleadings in the development of legislation to insure the financial underpinnings for retaining majority status at the polls? Is committee government any more likely to develop legislation in the national interest as opposed to placating various special interests?

With respect to this latter question, Woodrow Wilson thought party government would introduce a competition of ideas relating to the general good, while committee government was more special interest oriented. Political scientist William F. Connelly, Jr., has contrasted Wilson's party government ideal with Madisonian pluralism as follows:

In sum, Madison tends to promote a pluralist politics of contending interests within representative institutions that can refine and enlarge the public views. Wilson prefers a politics of ideas premised on the principled competition between responsible parties.²⁸

So, where does this leave us on the central question of whether party governance can endure in the House of Representatives? Put another way, given the oscillation through history between party and committee governance, is some form of committee governance likely to return? Despite my own ambivalence about the advisability of party governance in its most intrusive sense, my instincts tell me that the developments of the past quarter century have moved things up several notches toward broad acceptance by members in both parties of party leadership control of the institution, its processes, and policy agenda. It is highly unlikely Congress will return to a system in which committee chairmen are more powerful than the party leadership/caucus arrangement, though committees will still provide the expertise and bulk of legislative draftsmanship.

House Members find it convenient to delegate power and authority to their leaders to manage the legislative agenda, to help secure passage of legislation of importance to the party, and to assist members with their goals of reelection, policy influence, and institutional power. Barbara Sinclair has best described this as a principal-agent relationship, with party members being the principals, and leaders their agents.²⁹ If the leaders are not carrying out the wishes of their followers, the

followers, as principals, either call for a course correction, and get it, or they change leaders. Power delegated can be withdrawn, in one way or another.

Overall, this system of party organization and management in the House of Representatives seems to be here to stay, for better and worse, regardless of which party is in the majority. Ultimately it will be the American people, the true principals under our system, who will pass judgment on its efficacy and desirability, and determine whether some other system or party should assume their agency.

Endnotes

1. "Toward a More Responsible Two Party System," *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 44, issue 3, Part 2, Supplement (Sept., 1950). The Committee on Political Parties, chaired by E.E. Schattschneider, was formed in December 1946 to look into the condition and improvement of national party organization. The thesis of its final report as spelled out in its Foreword, was that the two party system was little more than a loose association of state and local party organizations, "with very little national machinery and very little national cohesion," leaving either political party, when in power, "ill-equipped to organize its members in the legislative and executive branches into a government held together and guided by the party program." This condition "affects the very heartbeat of American democracy," the report continued, and "poses grave problems in domestic and foreign policy in an era when it is no longer safe for the nation to deal piecemeal with issues that can be disposed of only on the basis of coherent programs." (v) The closes the committee came to recommending any constitutional change was to say, "it appears desirable to lengthen the terms of Representatives to four years," and "synchronized" with the term of the President. (75)
2. Newt Gingrich, *Lessons Learned the Hard Way: A Personal Report* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 10.
3. Reed first became Speaker in 1889 with the arrival of Republican President Benjamin Harrison. But Republicans lost control of the House in the elections of 1890. Reed returned to the Speakership in 1895, during the last two years of Democrat Grover Cleveland's second term. He then served two years as Speaker under Republican President William McKinley before resigning his seat over differences with McKinley's imperial policies in the Pacific. Republican David Henderson of Iowa served as Speaker for two terms before Cannon became Speaker—two years under McKinley and two under Theodore Roosevelt. Cannon then served for four terms as Speaker, two under Roosevelt and two under Republican William Howard before Republicans lost control of the House in 1910.
4. The Republican "regulars" under Speakers like Henderson and Cannon were generally resistant to progressive legislative ideas, and that is what led to the revolt against Speaker Cannon by a coalition of Democrats and insurgent progressive Republicans in 1910 who stripped Cannon of his chairmanship of, membership on, and authority to appoint members of, the House

Rules Committee.

5. *We Propose: A Modern Congress; Selected Proposals by the House Republican Task Force on Congressional Reform and Minority Staffing*, James C. Cleveland, M.C., Chairman, Mary McInnis, editor (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1966). I was privileged to help Anderson prepare a chapter for the book calling for a new Joint Committee on Research and Development in Congress.

6. Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1885; 1981 paperback edition), 82-83.

7. *Ibid*, 211.

8. *Ibid*, 81.

9. Richard Bolling, *House Out of Order* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1965); and *Power in the House* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968).

10. Bolling, *Power in the House*, 266.

11. Wilson, *Congressional Government*, 211.

12. *Ibid*, 85-86.

13. Richard Bolling, *Power in the House*, 266-268.

14. *Ibid*, 268-69.

15. *Ibid*, 269.

16. In a June 19, 1974, special order, titled "Crisis of Confidence in Congress and the Specter of King Caucus," Anderson said there was already evidence of the comeback of King Caucus "in all the worst possible senses of the term... secrecy, strict party unity and discipline, disregard for minority rights, restraints on the free operation of the legislative process in committees and on the floor, and resistance to meaningful reforms." He proceeded to detail the instances of these abuses, including three binding caucus votes on committee Democrats relating to Vietnam, committee reform, and the energy bill. A fourth instance occurred a month after his special order when the Caucus instructed Rules committee Democrats to make in order a Caucus substitute for Bolling's committee reform resolution.

17. H. Res. 1203, 93rd Congress, June 27, 1974. The Chair, Speaker Carl Albert, ruled against the resolution on grounds that it did not constitute a legitimate question of privilege because it attempted to change House rules by directing the Rules Committee to consider a rule for the committee reform resolution. Anderson appealed the ruling of the chair, but his appeal was tabled, 242 to 163.

18. Walter Taylor, *The Washington Star*, March 30, 1975, quoted in, Don Wolfensberger, "The Role of Party Caucuses in the House: An Historic Perspective," unpublished paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., Sept., 1988, 29-30.
19. Wolfensberger, "The Role of Party Caucuses," 30.
20. Ibid, 31.
21. Ibid, 32.
22. Ibid, 34-37.
23. Steven S. Smith, *Call to Order: Floor Politics in the House and Senate* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1989), 239.
24. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Donald R. Wolfensberger, *Congress and the People: Deliberative Democracy on Trial* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), chapter 10, "The Road to the Republican Revolution," 147-174.
25. Gerald B.H. Solomon & Donald R. Wolfensberger, "The Decline of Deliberative Democracy in the House and Proposals for Reform," *Harvard Journal on Legislation*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer 1994), 321-370.
26. U.S. House of Representatives, House Committee on Rules, "Broken Promises: The Death of Deliberative Democracy," A Congressional Report on the Unprecedented Erosion of the Democratic Process in the 108th Congress, Compiled by the House Rules Committee Minority Office, The Honorable Louise M. Slaughter, Ranking Member, March 8, 2005.
27. For a more thorough discussion of debate and deliberation, see Smith, *Call to Order*, 236-242.
28. William F. Connelly, Jr., Introduction to Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2004), xxx.
29. Barbara Sinclair, *Legislators, Leaders, and Lawmaking* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), chapter 2., "Legislators, Leaders, and Lawmaking: A Principal-Agent Approach," 8-18.