Different Constituencies, Different Priorities: Pork Barrel Politics in the House and Senate

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Abstract:
Because they represent different kinds of constituencies—states versus parts of states—House members and senators have different incentives in constructing programs to distribute federal funds. Senators represent entire states and thus are able to claim credit for funds allocated under the important formula grants to states that distribute the bulk of federal grants in aid. House members, however, are less able to claim credit for funds distributed to entire states and thus have a smaller electoral stake in state-based formula grant programs. Instead, they need to use earmarks to target funds to their particular constituencies. These different credit claiming opportunities affect the intensity of House and Senate preferences with respect to different kinds of distributive programs, making earmarks more important to House members than to senators and formula grant programs more important to senators than to House members. Examining House-Senate interactions over time in one of the largest and most long-standing federal distributive programs, federal aid to states for surface transportation, I show that the different bases of representation in the House and Senate (1) structure the chambers' preferences in designing distributive programs and (2) affect the outcomes of interchamber conflicts over such programs.

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Congressional scholars often assume that senators and House members have basically the same goals and interests in distributive politics: both House members and senators believe that providing federal funds for their constituents advances their reelection interests; both attempt to do so. Although House members and senators are similar in that they both seek federal funds for their constituencies, the different bases of representation in the two chambers shape their incentives in allocating federal funds in very different ways. Senators represent *states*, and states are not just another set of geographic districts, different from those represented in the House. Unlike congressional districts, states are administrative units in the federal system, and state governments play an important role in implementing most domestic policies. With the exception of the seven states with only one district, however, congressional districts are nothing more than electoral entities. Subject to decennial reapportionment and the constitutional requirement of one-person, one vote, congressional districts cross county and city lines, rarely following existing political divisions. As a consequence, Senate constituencies are often the direct recipients of federal funds, while House constituencies per se are not.

This difference in the two chambers' bases of representation has important consequences for the congressional politics of distributing federal funds. In distributive politics, senators' reelection interests are much more closely tied to states than are House members'. Whenever Congress considers the numerous large and important federal programs that distribute funds to states—including, for example, the Social Services Block Grant, Rehabilitation Services, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and the Surface Transportation Program—senators view themselves as responsible for representing the states' interests. As one senator explained when asked to compare the role of senators and House members, "The Senate brings with it the responsibility to represent the state governments. You must represent the state's interests in the major formula programs, like Title 1, Chapter 1, Education, Medicaid, Transportation" (quoted in Lee and Oppenheimer 1999, 193).

House members' interests, by contrast, are more closely tied to their districts than to their states. The median House member, after all, represents a state that has 12 other congressional districts. In this context, the average House member has difficulty claiming credit for funds that his state as a whole receives. Indeed, for many programs House members cannot be certain that even a generous allocation to their states will benefit their constituencies. Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.) complained about this problem during a 1998 floor debate over a program allocating funds to states, but not (necessarily) to his district: "In my region, Northern Virginia, we have been consistently shortchanged from the State government. [Federal] money that goes through Richmond does not come back to Northern Virginia in any way, shape or form" (*Cong. Record* 1998, H1898). State governments often possess wide discretion as they allocate federal funds within their jurisdictions, particularly in the largest grants in aid, the block grants.[1] House members, then, have a smaller electoral stake than senators in the programs that grant funds only to states as a whole; by contrast, they have a greater interest in programs that allocate funds in more targeted ways.

These different priorities in the House and Senate are significant for understanding pork barrel politics for three reasons. First, the two bodies are not likely to agree on distributive policy. The different bases of representation in the two chambers—states versus districts apportioned on the basis of population—are themselves a source of interchamber conflict over the geographic distribution of federal funds. Equal state representation in the Senate means that states with small populations have much greater representational power in the Senate than in the House, and the Senate's funding preferences reflect this small-state advantage (Atlas et al. 1995; Lee 1998; Lee and Oppenheimer 1999, 186-222; Stephens 1996). The Senate prefers to distribute funds in ways that are disproportionately beneficial to states with small populations (Lee 2000).

Second, the different priorities in the House and Senate will shape the outcomes of House-Senate negotiations. If the Senate is more concerned with programs that distribute funds to states, then its preferences should prevail when the chambers clash over such programs. During conference committee negotiations with the House, the Senate will trade away matters of less importance to senators in exchange for preserving its preferred distribution of funds to states. Similarly, if the House has stronger preferences regarding the distribution of funds for targeted programs than for general grants to states, then the outcomes of its interactions with the Senate will reflect this fact. The House will be willing to concede on state-based programs, but will fight harder to retain the program provisions that grant funds to their constituents more directly.

Third, to the extent that the House and Senate behave in the ways described, the Senate will play a greater role in determining overall distributive policy than the House. Most of the largest federal domestic spending programs grant funds to state governments, which are then charged with the responsibility of administering the programs and spending the funds. Although most individual federal domestic programs are small, narrowly targeted grants administered by executive departments, the bulk of all funds for domestic assistance are actually distributed by a relatively small number of large grants to states (Stein and Bickers 1995, 22). If the Senate takes a greater role in such programs than the House, it will in effect determine the allocation of more federal dollars than are at stake in all the targeted federal grants in aid combined.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the different bases of representation in the House and Senate shape the two chambers' interactions in distributive politics. First, drawing on the work of Mayhew (1974), Arnold (1979; 1981; 1990) and others, I will advance a theory to explain (1) the positions that the two chambers are likely to adopt for different types of distributive programs and (2) the outcomes of conference committee negotiations. Then, I will examine how this theory illuminates patterns of House-Senate interaction over time in one of the largest and most long-standing federal distributive programs, federal aid to states for surface transportation.

House and Senate Interests in Distributive Programs

Distributive policymaking in Congress is more than just making policy decisions to allocate funds for federal programs. Decisions about distributing federal funds must be made in a manner that enables members of Congress to claim credit for those benefits. After all, constituents cannot be expected to recognize the source of the federal largesse they receive. Members of Congress are thus not merely concerned that their constituents receive their fair share of benefits from federal programs. To advance their reelection interests, they also need to provide those benefits by means that show that they are responsible for having provided them.

When discussing ways that members of Congress can link their actions to perceptible distributive benefits, scholars have generally argued that such benefits need to be conferred narrowly. For example, Mayhew (1974, 54) writes that particularized benefits involve grants to a "specific individual group, or geographical constituency, the recipient being of a scale that allows a single congressman to be recognized (by relevant political actors and other congressmen) as the claimant of the benefit." The small scale of the recipient group lends credence to a legislator's claim that he is individually responsible for securing the benefit. Scholars have not considered, however, that conferring benefits "narrowly" means something different in the Senate than in the House. Policy tools that strengthen traceability in the House are not necessary in the Senate.

Congress distributes funds for domestic assistance using three policy tools: formulas, categorical grants, and projects or earmarks (Arnold 1979, 4-8). Categorical grants are programs addressing a narrowly defined policy problem and conferring authority on an executive agency to select recipients and allocate funds. Formula and project grants differ from categorical grants in that Congress retains full control over the distribution of funds. In the case of formulas, Congress writes a statute to allocate the funds among all the recipients, determining eligibility requirements and funding level for each. In project grants, Congress identifies individual projects in authorizing or appropriations legislation and specifies the amount of funds they will receive. Project grants actually involve small amounts of federal dollars, despite the controversy that often revolves around them. Citizens Against Government Waste, an organization devoted to identifying earmarked funds, estimated the cost of all such projects in 1999 at $17.7 billion (Williams 2000), approximately 0.1 percent of total nondefense federal outlays. Formula grants, on the other hand, are the primary tool that Congress uses to distribute grants in aid. In 1995 more than 90 percent of all federal funds for grants in aid were allocated in this way.[2] The recipients of formula grants, moreover, are almost always states: 86 percent of all formula grants in aid went to states in 1995.[3]

Given the different bases of representation in the two chambers, then, House members and senators face different challenges in making their roles in providing distributive benefits apparent to constituents. Senators can make use of the large, state-based, formula grant programs to play a visible and traceable role in distributive policymaking. When Congress considers such programs, senators can take the opportunity to claim credit for taking care of their states. Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.), for one example, lists among his significant achievements (in his one-page on-line biography for his official Senate web page) his success in gaining a funding increase for Montana's highways through a program that allocates funds based on a statutory formula: "Through his leadership . . . Montana secured a 60-percent boost in funding, providing the state with an annual average of $260 million for the next six years. (Montana received an average of $162 million a year for highway construction in the last six-year bill.)"

House members, by contrast, find state-based programs a less fertile ground for credit-claiming. House members have difficulty establishing their individual role in garnering the benefit, even when their states receive increases for particular federal grants in aid. In this situation, each House member must share credit with the rest of his state delegation; there are, in other words, "competitors" (Arnold 1990, 75) claiming credit for the achievement, thus obscuring traceability. With respect to programs that grant funds to states, House members effectively represent multi-member districts. Working to increase overall state allocations for federal grants in aid is thus less electorally useful for House members than for senators.

House members need to rely more heavily on project grants to link their own activities to the benefits their constituents receive. When a House member succeeds in earmarking funds with project grants, the narrow scope of the benefit enables him to claim credit for assisting his constituents. Rep. Bud Shuster (R-Pa.), former chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee, explained why House members need to use special earmarks in the following way: "I do not know how many Members I have had come to me and say, for example, my State government is all Republican, and I am a Democrat. I do not get anything in my district, so I need a high priority project. Or conversely, my State is all Democrat; and, as a Republican I do not get anything unless I have a high priority project" (*Cong. Record* 1998, H1887).

It is important to note that project grants are useful to senators, just as they are to House members. These grants present credit claiming opportunities for senators similar to those for House members. Because the federal sums involved in these programs are generally much smaller, however, senators are often better off devoting their efforts to securing increases for their states under formula-grant programs. In addition, project grants involve certain political costs. Project grants regularly draw the ire of columnists and newspaper editors as "pork barrel projects." Provided that the funds in question will still be sent to their states, senators have less need than House members to earmark funds and thus can afford to steer clear of "pork."

In sum, then, different policies present different credit claiming opportunities for House members and senators. Large formula grants to states are more electorally useful to senators than to House members. House members need to use more targeted grants to make their individual contributions to distributive policy traceable. These different electoral stakes will translate into differing priorities in conference committee negotiations. Because the electoral stakes in formula grants are higher for senators, the Senate will press harder to sustain its position on these grants than will the House. The House, on the other hand, will take a greater interest in maintaining its position on the more targeted project grants than on formula grants.

Studying Surface Transportation Policy

To test this theory of House-Senate interactions in distributive policy, I examined all major surface transportation legislation since the inception of the Interstate Highway Program in 1956. The set of programs that make up federal surface transportation policy is a useful place to assess these generalizations for several reasons.

First, demand for transportation funds is great, if not constant, across all areas of the country. This is generally not true for other distributive programs, such as military bases, water projects, and emergency services for the homeless. Every state and every congressional district has roads, highways and bridges, and thus has members of Congress who take an interest in the distribution of transportation dollars. Second, ideology plays a relatively minor role in these policies. Everyone—Republicans, Democrats, conservatives and liberals—supports surface transportation spending, and thus conflict centers on the distribution of funds, rather than on the existence or scope of the program. Third, although surface transportation policy involves the largest federal distributive programs, it has received little attention from scholars.[4]

After compiling a comprehensive list of all surface transportation authorizations since 1956, I compared the House- and Senate-passed versions of each bill. First, I determined whether the two chambers took divergent positions on the programs. If so, I then analyzed these differences to determine if they were consistent with the theory advanced. Do the House- and Senate-preferred formulas differ in the expected ways, with the Senate's distributions more favorable to less populous states? Do House-passed bills contain more project grants than Senate bills? Second, I needed to determine the chambers' priorities on programs. Which disputed provisions did the chambers regard as essential and which as negotiable or expendable? To uncover this, I did two things. First, I analyzed the debates in the *Congressional Record* to find out what members emphasized in their comments on their chambers' bills. In particular, I focused on the debates on surface transportation conference reports to identify which provisions the bill managers mention as particularly difficult issues during the conference committee's negotiations. Second, by reference to the provisions in the final legislation, I determined the winner and loser for each House-Senate dispute. Given that the chambers are co-equal, if one chamber tends to dominate on a particular disputed matter over time, it indicates that the winning chamber holds stronger preferences on the issue than the losing chamber.

Formula Grants

> And if the House will not give us our fair highway formula, then we need not worry about their . . . concerns, because frankly, this whole bill is going to otherwise go down in flames.
> --Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) (*Cong. Record* 1982, S32635-6)

Throughout the history of the federal surface transportation program, almost all funds have been distributed to states by statutory formulas (Rose 1990; United States 1995). As in many other formula-based programs (Lee and Oppenheimer 1999), the formulas in transportation programs have been a perennial source of conflict between the House and Senate. Congress reauthorized surface transportation programs seventeen times between 1956 and 1998.[5] During this period, Congress reconsidered the funding formulas ten times, and the House and Senate disagreed on each of these occasions.

Were disagreements over funding formulas actually caused by the chambers' different bases of representation? The Senate represents all states equally, while states' representation in the House is weighted by population. To the extent that legislative apportionment shapes funding formula preferences, then, we would expect to see three patterns in House and Senate formulas. First, the Senate formula will distribute funds more equally across all states than the House formula, reflecting states' equal representational power in the chamber. Second, a majority of states should receive more under the Senate formulas than under the House formulas, while a majority of congressional districts should receive more under the House formulas. Third, the Senate formulas should distribute funds in ways that are, compared to the House, more beneficial to less populous states and less beneficial to more populous states.

Table 1 displays data on the distributive patterns in House and Senate funding formulas for six surface transportation authorizations between 1956 and 1998. These six authorizations were selected for presentation because state-by-state data on funding apportionment for both House and Senate bills were available in the public record.[6] The data are largely consistent with expectations. The Senate regularly distributes funds more equally across states than does the House. For each authorization year, the difference between the state receiving the smallest percentage of the total funds and the state receiving the largest percentage is greater in the House bill than in the Senate bill. Similarly, the standard deviation on the variable measuring each state's percentage of the funds allocated by the formula is larger in the House bill than in the Senate bill for every authorization. In short, the Senate prefers its formulas because, as Chairman of Senate Public Works Dennis Chavez (D-N.Mex.) argued during the 1956 formula dispute, "every state wishes to be treated like every other" (*Cong. Record* 1956, S9078).

The data on the number of states and congressional districts benefiting from the formulas, also presented in Table 1, provide additional evidence that the chambers' different bases of apportionment are the source of interchamber conflicts over formulas. In each year other than 1998, a majority of states were better off under the Senate bill than under the House bill. (In 1998, twenty-five states were better off under the Senate bill and twenty-five would have been better off under the House bill.[7]) Similarly, the House-passed formulas typically benefit far more congressional districts than those in the Senate's bills. The Senate's formulas are simply not politically viable in the House; in fact, often fewer than one fifth of congressional districts would be better off under the Senate formula than under the House formula.

The one exception to the pattern lies in 1956; in this authorization, the year when the Interstate Highway program was fully funded, the House formula did not benefit more congressional districts than the Senate formula. In its 1956 bill the House distributed funds to construct the Interstate Highway System simply on the basis of what each state Department of Transportation estimated it would need to complete the designated mileage. The 1956 Senate formula would have distributed more funds to a majority of congressional districts than the House bill. House members in 1956 thus appear to have been little motivated by parochial concerns when considering the initial authorization of the Interstate Highway program. In general, however, the data demonstrate that the House and Senate prefer different funding formulas because different formulas are needed to benefit majorities in the two chambers.

Outcomes of House-Senate Conflicts on Formulas

The different bases of representation structure House and Senate preferences for distributive policy. The two bodies are, moreover, formally equal in power. Thus, if their preferences are equally strong, compromise should be the most likely outcome of conference committee negotiation. In such situations, the chambers should simply split-the-difference between the House and Senate positions.

Table 2 summarizes the House and Senate positions and the final outcomes of the conflicts for each of the ten times the two chambers clashed on surface transportation formulas between 1956 and 1998. The most striking characteristic of these formula debates is their repetitiveness. Throughout the period the same conflicts recur, with the two chambers taking the same positions throughout. The House consistently supported two positions. First, it opposed minimum allocations to states, attempting in five of the conflicts to either eliminate them or restrict their application.[8] Many federal programs—transportation programs among them—include provisions that guarantee that no state will receive less than a certain percentage of the overall program funds. These provisions typically guarantee each state at least 0.5 percent of the total funds, in effect distributing a quarter of all program funds equally across states. Members often refer to these guarantees as "small state minimums" because the beneficiaries are always less populous states.

Second, the House attempts to allocate funds on the basis of formula factors that reflect states' level of highway use. Highway use measures, such as vehicle miles traveled in the state, and gas and diesel fuel consumption, correlate with state population; states with more cars and more heavily used highways are also states with large populations. The House attempted to place more weight on population or use-based factors in every authorization conflict since 1978. The Senate, by contrast, prefers to allocate funds on the basis of state characteristics—such as miles of postal routes in the state, state area, and Interstate lane miles—rather than on measures of highway use. The use of these factors directs funds to less populous states and usually ensures that at least a majority of states will receive more funds than under House formula. These recurring conflicts stem from the structure of apportionment in the chambers, and they were not new, even in 1956. As Sen. Robert Kerr (D-Okla.) noted during the formula dispute of 1956: "The Senator from Connecticut knows, not only of the record on this bill, but with reference to every piece of highway legislation passed in the past 20 years that . . . the House will always be ready to change the formula of distribution so as to give greater significance to the population phase in the allocation formula" (*Cong. Record* 1956, S9080).

The outcomes of these conflicts reveal that compromise was not the most likely result. The most common outcome was for the Senate position to prevail without any alteration, as occurred in 6 out of the 10 conflicts. The House position, by contrast, never emerged from conference unchanged. Taken as a group, even the compromise outcomes tended to favor the Senate position. On two of the four occasions when the House and Senate compromised on formulas (1981 and 1998), the final outcome correlated more closely with the Senate position than the House position. One compromise (1982) split the difference between the chambers. On only one occasion (1956) was the final outcome closer to the House position than the Senate.

Overall, the general pattern of House-Senate interactions supports the theory that senators take greater interest in state-based formula grant programs than House members. The records of House and Senate floor consideration of these formulas only reinforce this conclusion. Floor fights over funding formulas were common in the Senate during the period, occurring during consideration of surface transportation legislation in 1956, 1976, 1981, 1984, 1985, 1991 and 1997. Some of these conflicts proved difficult to resolve, involving extended wrangles that Sen. John Warner (R-Va.) dubbed the "battles of the charts" (*Cong. Record* 1998, S1298). No comparable controversies took place in the House in any year. Instead, conflict on the House floor typically centered on the inclusion of special projects or on nondistributive issues, such as Davis-Bacon prevailing wage provisions. In sum, senators clash over funding formulas more frequently than House members, and the Senate tends to win on funding formulas in conference with the House. The same theory can explain both patterns: senators simply feel that they have more at stake than House members in such conflicts.

Special Projects

> Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 15 seconds to inform the body that, this being April 1, somebody has sent out a bogus press release from my office saying that I oppose high-priority congressional projects. I just want to make sure that everybody understands this is in the good spirit of April Fool's Day, and it is not accurate.
> --Rep. Bud Shuster (R-Pa.) (*Cong. Record* 1998, H1905).

> While the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee has shown great restraint in this area, it is well understood that the House of Representatives has been unable to curtail this practice.
> --Sen. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) (*Cong. Record* 1998, S1821).

Special projects—termed "demonstration projects" in transportation bills because their stated legislative purpose is often to test new techniques for highway construction, safety, or congestion mitigation—are a relatively new invention. Neither the House nor the Senate included special projects in transportation bills before 1972. During earlier eras Congress turned elsewhere for opportunities to claim credit for providing particularized benefits, focusing on rivers and harbors projects (Ferejohn 1974; Wilson 1986), among other policy areas. Since the 1970s, however, special projects have become increasingly common in transportation legislation, with the most recent authorization in 1998 designating more than 1,500 such earmarks.

House members take less interest in formula grants than senators for the likely reason that the benefits provided in this way are less traceable to their actions. Project grants (or earmarks), however, are a different matter altogether. The narrow scope of these grants, combined with their precise geographical targeting, enable House members (as well as senators) to claim credit for providing benefits to constituents. They use such grants to bolster their reputations for attending to constituents and helping them get their fair share of federal funds. With respect to transportation programs (and all other programs that provide funds directly to states), however, senators can claim credit for providing funds to their constituents without the use of targeted project grants; instead, they can claim credit for the much larger sums that states receive from formula grants. Senators, therefore, are likely to take less interest in earmarking funds for transportation than House members.

Given these incentives, House-Senate interactions on special projects in surface transportation legislation should exhibit certain patterns. Because House members, unlike senators, need these projects for credit claiming, the House should have a greater commitment to providing them than the Senate. House bills should thus include such projects more often than

Senate bills. The *Record* should also indicate that House members regard these projects as a higher legislative priority than senators.

This does not mean, however, that the Senate should just concede to the House on projects, in the way that the House tends to defer to the Senate's position on formulas. Instead, the pressure on Congress to refrain from pork barrel spending may make it politically attractive for the Senate to fight the House on projects. Even though Congress is able to use formula grants to provide disproportionate benefits to particular geographic areas, special projects have become synonymous in common parlance with "pork barrel spending."[9] While House members need special projects to demonstrate their commitment to constituents, senators can benefit from opposing the House on projects and thus laying claim to fiscal responsibility. At the same time, of course, they can claim credit for taking care of constituents by pointing to their successes in garnering funds under the state-based formula grants that are rarely perceived as pork barrel spending. Unlike with formula grants, then, there is no reason to assume at the outset that one chamber will have more intense preferences than the other on the matter of including (or excluding) special projects. As a consequence the outcomes of House-Senate interactions on project grants are more difficult to predict.

Table 3 summarizes the House and Senate positions on special projects for each authorization in which the two chambers conflicted on the subject, as well as the outcomes of those conflicts. First, it is apparent from the data that the House and Senate clash over transportation project grants just as frequently as they do over transportation formulas. The House and Senate bills differed with respect to project grants on 10 authorizations since 1972. Second, the data reveal that the House provides the main impetus for the inclusion of project grants in transportation legislation. House transportation bills contain special projects more often than do Senate bills. On the occasions when the House and Senate both include special projects, the number of projects in the House bill is greater and their cost higher.

Beginning in 1975, the House almost always included special projects in its transportation authorizations, while the Senate usually did not. As the number of projects the House wanted increased, the subject became increasingly controversial in conference. House and Senate conflict on the issue was intense enough to lead to the breakdown of two conference committees during the period studied (1984 and 1986).

Compromise is the most typical outcome of House-Senate conflict over special transportation projects. In the 1970s when the House sought funding for few projects, the Senate agreed to them in conference and allowed the House to win the disputes. As the House demanded increasingly more projects in the 1980s, the Senate became less willing to accede to them. Since 1986 the two chambers have compromised on projects in every surface transportation authorization. Unlike with formula grants, however, the Senate's preferences on projects grants have never been adopted in conference committee without alteration.

The agreements reached in the 1991 and 1998 conflicts over projects highlight two further implications of the chambers' different bases of apportionment. First, House members appear to regard assistance to their districts as their top priority in distributive politics, even if their district interests conflict with those of their states as a whole. In both these years, the compromise allowed House members to retain their projects, but all such projects had to be funded from states' regular formula allocations. In other words, House members could earmark funds for particular congressional districts, but no additional moneys would be provided to their states to fund them. Although House legislation had initially provided that these projects be funded outside of states' formula allocations, House members under pressure from the Senate agreed to pay for them out of funds the states would receive anyway.

Second, when the Senate authorizes projects of its own, they—unlike House projects—need not be targeted for specific purposes for senators to claim credit for them. In both the 1991 and 1998 conference negotiations Senate conferees demanded that the House reduce its project requests and then added special projects of their own, even though the original Senate-passed bills had included none (Mills 1991; Ota 1998a).[10] The Senate's projects differed from the House's in a significant respect, however: they were generally not targeted at specific projects within states. Instead, most were just additional lump sums of cash for their state departments of transportation. The Senate "projects" were thus like formula grants in that they generally left states "free to chose how to spend them" (CQ Almanac 1991, 146).[11] The Senate projects, then, were just monetary concessions that senators extracted before agreeing to the House projects.

As with formula grants, House-Senate interactions on projects reflect the chambers' bases of apportionment. The House takes a greater interest in project grants than the Senate because House members need them to claim credit for providing benefits to their constituencies. Senators, however, do not need special projects, given that they will be able to claim credit for the much larger sums that states receive in formula grants. Because special projects are so closely associated with pork barrel spending, moreover, the Senate has strong reason to oppose the House's efforts to include them. In the end, the compromises reached have almost always permitted House members to retain special projects. Even though the funds involved in special projects never constitute more than a small proportion of the total funds to be authorized for transportation, the Senate only concedes to the House at a price. First, the Senate always bids down federal funding for House projects, in 1991 and 1998 providing no additional funds for them. Second, the Senate requires House members to cut back their projects and redistribute some of those funds according to Senate preferences. Thus, in the conflicts over special projects, the Senate gains additional leverage over the distribution of federal funds for transportation.

Conclusion

> House members have a very different view on the highway program, compared to Senators. It is, very simply, because we Senators represent entire States; House members don't represent entire States, except for a very few. . . . Most Members of Congress, who tend to be from populous States, such as New York, California, and Florida, . . . are really much more interested in their districts; what is the highway bill going to do for their districts, rather than for their States? Of course they care about their States. They care deeply about their States. But I dare say they probably care a little bit more about their district. . . . Senators are worried about State distribution. House members are worried a little bit about State distribution, but quite a bit about how much their districts get. Hence, we have this phenomenon called demonstration projects."
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> --Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) (*Cong. Record* 1998, S5393)

Despite widely-held stereotypes to the contrary, House members are not more "parochial" than senators. Both House members and senators are concerned about how federal programs will affect their constituencies and about how their constituents will perceive their individual contributions to distributive programs. Because they represent different kinds of constituencies, House members and senators have different incentives in constructing federal distributive programs. In order to make their contributions to constituents visible, House members need to use project grants to target funds to their districts. Senators, however, are able to claim credit for funds allocated to states under both formula and project grants. When they are considering programs that allocate funds to states, then, senators do not need to earmark special projects because they are able to claim credit for funds that their state receives as a whole.

These different incentives structure House-Senate interactions in distributive politics. This study of surface transportation authorizations between 1956 and 1998 shows that the bases of apportionment in the two chambers lead them to adopt consistent positions on distributive programs. Although their memberships have almost entirely turned over during the period studied, the chambers' positions on different types of distributive programs have been remarkably stable over time. In formula grants, the Senate always distributed funds more generously to less populous states than the House. Because formula grant funds are more "traceable" to senators than to House members, the House tended to concede to the Senate position on formulas. The Senate position on funding formulas was regularly adopted in conference committee without alteration, while the House position never emerged from conference unchanged.

The House, however, takes greater interest in special projects. As on formulas, House-Senate conflict maintained a consistent pattern on special projects. House bills included more special projects and included them more frequently than Senate bills. Senators frequently did not include project grants in transportation authorizations, meanwhile taking credit for showing "fiscal restraint" in not doing so. Unlike for formula grants, compromise was the most common outcomes of House-Senate conflicts over project and categorical grants.

Two important implications follow from these patterns in House-Senate interactions. First, the Senate has a greater impact on the overall distribution of federal funds to states than the

House. Funding formulas distribute almost all federal funds for surface transportation, just as they distribute the bulk of all funds for federal grants in aid. Differences in apportionment shape both the content and intensity of House-Senate preferences on formulas, resulting in a pattern where conference committee outcomes on formulas more closely reflected Senate preferences than House preferences.

Second, the differences in House and Senate incentives in distributive politics should sensitize political observers to the many ways that "pork" can be packaged. Political scientists and journalists, like the public at large, tend to conceptualize the "pork barrel" as consisting of earmarks for specific geographic areas. But special projects are not the only way for Congress to distribute funds disproportionately to particular geographical areas. Formula grants determine the allocation of most federal funds, and they are not immune from parochial manipulation. Senators fight as vigorously for their states in formula disputes as House members do for their districts. The difference, however, is that considerably more money is at stake when Congress considers funding formulas than in the special projects so frequently derided as "pork barrel spending."

Notes

[1] Since the early 1980s, many categorical grants have been consolidated into block grants to states. The most recent additions to the list have been the block grants for Surface Transportation, Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse, Community Health Services, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, all created since 1991.
[2] Calculated by the author from the list provided in the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations' report *Characteristics of Federal Grant-In-Aid Programs to State and Local Governments: Grants Funded FY 1995*.
[3] Calculated by the author from the list provided in the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations' report *Characteristics of Federal Grant-In-Aid Programs to State and Local Governments: Grants Funded FY 1995*.
[4] Political scientists interested in distributive politics have studied water projects and waste treatment construction programs (Ferejohn 1974; Strom 1975; Wilson 1986); community, urban, and economic development grants (Anagnoson 1982; Gist and Hill 1984; Hooton 1997; Plott 1968; Rich 1991); academic earmarks (Balla, Maltzman, and Sigelman 2000; Savage 1999); and military contracts (Carsey and Rundquist 1999a; 1999b; Goss 1972; Rundquist 1978; Rundquist and Griffith 1976). But there has been almost no scholarship on surface transportation policy.
[5] The federal aid for surface transportation programs were reauthorized in 1956, 1958, 1960, 1961, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1973, 1976, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1985, 1987, 1991, and 1998.
[6] Complete state by state data was not available for the 1973, 1976, 1981 and 1985 authorizations. Checking the relevant committee reports, documents, hearings and dates in the *Congressional Record* did not yield state by state figures for both House and Senate bills during these years.
[7] Although the internal Senate politics surrounding the 1998 formula is examined in more depth elsewhere (Lee 2000), it is important to note that the formula in the final Senate bill was never directly measured up against the House formula on the Senate floor. Instead, three different formula proposals were initially introduced in the Senate, the House formula among them. In this environment the House formula was rejected as benefiting far fewer states than the two alternatives being considered. The final Senate formula was a compromise product that, relative to the status quo, provided transportation funding increases to 35 states.
[8] The House deleted or limited the small state minimum in 1956, 1973, 1976, 1985 and 1987.
[9] See, for example, the definition of "pork" in the Citizens Against Government Waste's annual publication *The Congressional Pig Book Summary*.
[10] Rep. Bud Shuster (R-Pa.) complained about this, noting that "the Senate castigates projects. . . . But when they come to conference at about 2 a.m. on the 21st day, they reach in their pocket and pull out a list" (Ota 1998b, 737).
[11] In 1998, most of the money that Senate conferees designated for special projects was actually just "lump sum payments to states to use for unspecified projects" (Ota 1998a, 1465).

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Table 1: Distributive Patterns in House and Senate Funding Formulas for Federal Grants in Aid for Surface Transportation, 1956-1998

	Number states better off	Number congres-sional districts better off	Equality of Distribution Across States		
			Minimum (% of total)	Maximum (% of total)	Standard Deviation
1956 – Interstate Construction					
House plan	18	182	0.30	10.00	1.96
Senate plan	30	253	0.60	7.10	1.48
1978 – Interstate Maintenance					
House plan	24	338	0.00	8.88	1.69
Senate plan	26	96	0.13	7.60	1.47
1982 – Primary Roads					
House plan	23	320	0.20	8.48	1.83
Senate plan	27	115	0.51	6.95	1.41
1987 – Interstate Maintenance					
House plan	22	332	0.21	11.12	2.05
Senate plan	28	103	0.51	9.74	1.73
1991 – Surface Transportation					
House plan	23	289	0.44	9.88	1.80
Senate plan	27	146	0.44	9.11	1.70
1998 – Surface Transportation					
House plan	25	320	0.41	9.74	1.78
Senate plan	25	115	0.47	9.24	1.67

Table 2: House and Senate Positions on Apportionment Formulas for Federal Grants in Aid for Surface Transportation, 1956-1998

Year	Program	Senate position	House position	Outcome
1956	Interstate construction	Based apportionment on traditional highway formula; guaranteed small states minimum of .75% of total funds.	Based apportionment on state DOT's estimates of the cost of constructing the interstate mileage (ICE)	*Compromise* (House advantaged) First 3 years on Senate formula; the next 10 years based on the ICE
1973	Interstate construction	Senate guaranteed minimum of .5% of total funds to small states, even if mileage was complete	House limited the .5% small state minimum to states that had not completed their mileage	*Senate*
1976	Interstate construction	Senate guaranteed .5% of total funds to small states, even if mileage was complete	House limited .5% small state minimum to states that had not completed their mileage	*Senate*
1978	Interstate maintenance	Senate formula weighted toward states' interstate lane mileage	House formula based 50% on states' interstate lane mileage, 50% on vehicle miles traveled.	*Senate*
1981	Interstate maintenance	Senate formula weighted toward states' interstate lane mileage	House formula based 50% on states' interstate lane mileage, 50% on vehicle miles traveled.	*Compromise* (the two chambers split the difference between their positions)
1982	Primary roads	Senate formula based on states' land area, primary road mileage and population	House formula based on states' urban and rural population	*Compromise* (Senate advantaged) Final allocations correlate more closely with the Senate position
1985	Interstate maintenance Interstate construction	Senate retained status quo on maintenance formula and .5% small state minimum.	House formula for maintenance based entirely on factors measuring highway use; deleted .5% minimum	*Senate*
1987	Interstate maintenance	Senate retained status quo	House formula based on factors measuring highway use	*Senate*
1991	Surface Transportation	Senate formula allocated each state an average of its receipts under all highway programs for the previous 5 years	House instituted new formulas based on highway use factors for all highway programs; guaranteed states higher return on highway taxes	*Senate*
1998	Surface Transportation	Senate largely retained status quo. Included more use-based factors, but provided "transition payments" to ensure states receive as much as in the past.	House instituted new formulas based on highway use factors for all highway programs.	*Compromise* (Senate advantaged) The final allocations to states correlate more closely with the Senate position than with the House position.

Table 3: Outcomes of House-Senate Conflicts over Special Projects In Highway Authorizations, 1956-1998

Year	House position	Senate position	Outcome
1972	Specified 3 special projects.	Special project for West Virginia	Conference *failed* to produce report (for unrelated reasons)
1973	Same projects as above	Senate bill contained the W.Va. project, the 1972 House projects, and a few additional projects	*House* Conference included the House projects, but only the Senate West Virginia project. Cost not available
1975	House bill contained four demonstration projects	No new special projects	*House* Senate "with some reluctance" accepted the House projects (*Cong. Rec*. 4/13/76, S10742) Cost <0.01% of total
1978	House bill contained seven demonstration projects	No new special projects	*House* Projects included in final bill. Senate aides "labeled the House measure 'pure pork'" (1978 *CQ Almanac*, p. 544) Cost <0.6 % of total
1984	House bill contained 52 special projects at an estimated cost of $2.45 billion.	Senate bill contained 16 special projects at an estimated cost of $178.6 million.	Conference *failed* to produce a report. "The conference broke up over the insistence of Senate conferees that a cap be placed on funding for special highway and bridge projects" (1984 *CQ Almanac*, p. 290).
1985	House bill had no special projects; these were left out to expedite legislation and get funds to states.	Senate bill contained no special projects. Sen. James Abdnor (R-S.D.): "We were able to embarrass our colleagues in the House into removing . . . their projects" (Gettinger 1985).	*Compromise* Conference report contained no demonstration projects.
1986	House bill included 100 demonstration projects. Cost of $1 billion.	Senate bill included 70 special projects, but required funding to come from states' regular allocations.	Conference *failed* to produce a report. Differences over funding of projects were one of greatest controversies (1986 *CQ Almanac*, p. 284).
1987	House bill included 100 projects, all 100% federally funded. Cost of $1.2 billion.	Senate bill contained 99 special projects, but they were to be funded at the request of the state and deducted from states' regular allocations.	*Compromise* Conference report had 120 special projects, evenly divided between House and Senate. Cost $890 million,1% of total. Compromise on funding.
1991	House bill included 489 special projects at cost of $73 billion.	Senate bill had no special projects.	*Compromise* Conference report included 539 projects costing $6.2 billion. Most projects from the House bill. All projects funded from states' regular allocations. Cost=4% of total.
1998	House bill contained 1,506 special projects, not funded by states' regular allocations. Cost of $9 billion.	Senate bill had no special projects. Senate adopted an amendment requiring any special projects to be funded from regular allocations.	*Compromise* Conference report included 1,506 projects. House project budget was cut by $2.35 billion and the money was devoted to Senate priorities. Special projects funded from states regular allocations. Cost=9.8% of total.