

17.20: Introduction to the American Political Process
Paper Assignment #1
Due 11:00 AM on March 11th

Over the last couple weeks you have spent some time investigating a piece of legislation under consideration by a committee on which your Member of Congress serves.

For this 6 to 8 page paper I would like you describe the origins of this bill, describe its likely fate, and offer recommendations to your Member of Congress.

The first question to consider is where your legislation came from. Who proposed the bill? What interest groups and other political actors were involved in its creation?

Next consider the bill's likely fate. Where is the bill in the legislative process? What is the likelihood it will pass? You should make use of ADA scores and/or NOMINATE score as discussed in class.

Consider not only legislative action in the House, but the Bill's possible fate in the Senate and on the desk of the President. Will the bill succeed in the house, but fail in the Senate? Will it be vetoed by the president? What sorts of bargaining do you expect? You should consider the location of the relevant pivots (following Krehbiel) and the relevant veto players (following Cameron).

Some useful questions to consider as you describe the potential fate of the bill might be:

- Has similar legislation been considered before? Why did that legislation succeed or fail in the House of Representatives? Do you think the bill currently under consideration will meet a similar fate as earlier legislation? Why or why not?
- Why has this bill been introduced? Is it to create new policy? To overturn existing legislation?
- What alternatives to the bill are being considered? What amendments might be offered?

Finally, put yourself in the position of an advisor to your Member of Congress. How should s/he vote? What amendments should s/he offer and when? In the committee? On the floor? Will the final bill be acceptable to your member? How should s/he vote in committee?

While there are indeed correct answers to these questions, I do not expect you to be a prophet. Instead, I want you to make a case – based on your knowledge of the bill and the policymaking processes of Congress – on what will happen to the bill and what actions your Member of Congress should take.

Some helpful links for information concerning this paper:

1. Thomas: Legislative information on the Internet

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

2. Congressional Quarterly (note: there are limits on the number of simultaneous users allowed, so you might have trouble getting access if others are trying to log on at the same time)

Access through VERA database – do a search for the journal “CQ”

3. On NOMINATE scores, see Keith Pool’s website

<http://voteview.uh.edu/default.htm>

4. Additional links can be found on the Open Courseware website of Professor Stewart’s “Congress and the American Political System” Course.

<http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/Political-Science/17-251Congress-and-the-American-Political-System-IFall2000/RelatedResources/index.htm>