

The Impression of Influence:
How Legislator Communication and Government
Spending Cultivate a Personal Vote

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Chapter 1

Representation, Spending, and the Personal Vote

1.1 Introduction

Spending is one of the most consequential powers of government. The constitution empowers Congress to “pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general welfare of the United States.” Federal spending has pervasive influence—impacting nearly every aspect of American life. How Congress allocates money affects the quality of infrastructure in American cities, the availability of health care, the provision of housing, preparedness for natural disasters, the ability to protect against crime and fire, preparations for national defense, deterrence of potential terror attacks, and even the extent of basic research at universities—not to mention spending for entitlement programs. Across the United States, federal spending has broad influence on national macroeconomic conditions. And expenditures directed at Congressional districts have an even more potent influence on local economies.

When legislators make decisions about how to spend money they exercise control over the shape and quality of American life. During regular appropriations cycles representatives collectively determine funding levels at bureaucratic agencies, affecting where and how the federal government disburses funds. Sometimes legislators intervene directly and exercise control over expenditures—earmarking money in appropriations bills for specific projects in their districts. Representatives use other indirect methods to influence how money is spent, sending letters of support for grant applicants in their district or phone calls to persuade bureaucrats to allocate money to local projects. Political representation in Congress is, in large part, about how elected officials allocate federal spending.

This book is about how political representation occurs on government spending decisions—how constituents attribute expenditures in the district to legislators, how constituents evaluate those expenditures, and how constituents hold legislators accountable for the spending decisions. While a large literature analyzes the relationship between district expenditures and support for incumbents (Stein and Bickers, 1994; Levitt and Snyder, 1997; Lazarus, 2009), how federal expenditures affect incumbent support remains unclear. One reason for this lack of clarity is that constituents are unlikely to learn about the projects on their own. Constituents’ inability to track spending is not an indictment of their democratic competence. Instead, it reflects the many activities representatives perform and the subtle ways federal expenditures occur. Constituents lack the time, capacity, and incentive to carefully track what their representatives do in Congress to direct spending to the district. Even when spending reaches the district, it is difficult for constituents to attribute that spending to their representative. Projects in the district often do not have an obvious connection to

the federal government (Mettler, 2011). And even if constituents do recognize that a project in the district comes from the federal government, they may fail to link the project to their representatives (Kriner and Reeves, 2012).

Constituents' difficulties in tracking spending projects in their district creates a problem for reelection motivated members of Congress. A large literature in political science argues that legislators use federal expenditures to cultivate support with their constituents and build a personal vote—support not based on partisan affiliation nor ideological agreement (Fenno, 1978; Fiorina, 1977; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987). For representatives to receive direct credit for spending in the district, they have to overcome constituents' inattention to politics. Without overcoming this inattention, even the legislators who is most dutiful at delivering projects to this district may fail to be rewarded at the next election.

We show how legislators solve the problem of constituent inattention and instead use it as an opportunity to create electoral support. Legislators use credit claiming messages—messages intended to “generate a belief that a legislator is responsible” for spending in the district—to ensure that constituents learn about spending projects in the district and attribute government actions to their representative (Mayhew, 1974). When legislators claim credit for spending they cultivate an impression of influence over federal expenditures, or a reputation as effective at delivering expenditures to the district. Legislators use regular public statements to inform constituents about spending projects, articulate the benefits of the project, and to explain why constituents should reward legislators for the expenditures. Constituents allocate credit in response to the messages, but are responsive to features of messages that differ from previous explanations of how spending builds support for legislators. This cre-

ates an opportunity for legislators to receive credit for more than just expenditures as they happen in the district. Legislators' credit claiming messages enable them to claim credit broadly, for relatively small expenditures, for projects that only have a small probability of reaching the district, and for grants a legislator had only a small role in securing.

When deciding how often to claim credit and what to claim credit for, legislators act like entrepreneurs—anticipating how constituents will respond to particular kinds of messages and messaging strategies (Arnold, 1992). Legislators' entrepreneurial messaging enables them to influence constituents' terms of evaluations, encouraging constituent evaluations that are favorable to the legislator. Legislators with constituents who are the most responsive to federal expenditures or with constituents who are unsympathetic to the legislator's ideological positions engage in credit claiming at higher rates than other legislators, who articulate positions on salient partisan and ideological debates. Legislators' credit claiming induces constituents to reward their representative for spending projects. By inducing constituents to reward legislators for spending projects, they direct constituent attention away from ideological alignment or partisan attachments, creating the conditions for a personal vote.

Legislators' credit claiming efforts are effective—they cultivate an impression of influence over expenditures and bolster overall support for legislators. When constituents allocate credit in response to legislators' messages they tend to evaluate the action that legislators report performing, rather than the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing. Constituents reward legislators for actions throughout the expenditure process—even if the expenditures have yet to be secured, will only be delivered to the district in the distant future, and even if constituents recognize

the project has only a small chance of actually occurring. Constituents are also very responsive to other qualitative pieces of information about messages—including who is announcing the expenditure and the recipient of the project. But constituents are largely unresponsive to the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing. Even large increases in the amount legislators claim credit for securing tend to cause only small increases in support for legislators.

Representation on spending occurs through a legislator credit claiming, constituent credit allocation process that occurs outside of Congress, but the process that we describe has implications for the design of federal institutions—how spending decisions are made and the types of programs that persist. An increasingly large number of federal grants are allocated through competitive programs, that limit bureaucratic discretion, limiting the ability of bureaucrats to cultivate Congressional support. The credit claiming, credit allocation process, however, creates an opportunity for politically robust competitive grant programs. We show how a robust competitive spending institution emerges, as the result of bureaucrats cultivating support merely by creating credit claiming opportunities. Bureaucrats can cultivate support with credit claiming opportunities because constituents are responsive to legislators’ credit claiming messages, making it valuable to legislators to merely announce a grant—even if the representative had only an indirect role in securing the expenditure. Bureaucrats at spending programs recognize that legislators value the opportunity to announce grants in their districts and funnel information to Congressional offices so they can announce the expenditure before the agency. Legislators take advantage of this opportunity, using subtle language to imply that they are responsible for expenditures, but never literally claiming credit for the project. Constituents allocate credit in

response to the messages, inferring that legislators are responsible for the spending. And legislators who make use of the credit claiming messages, in turn, defend the competitive programs when threatened with budget cuts.

Legislators engage in credit claiming to cultivate constituent support, but there legislators face risks if they claim credit too often for spending in the district. When representatives claim credit for expenditures in the district, they are associating themselves with particularistic government spending that future opponents, or members of another party, may label as wasteful. This risk became particularly salient after the election of Barack Obama and the emergence of the conservative Tea Party movement. After Obama's election Congressional Republicans shifted their rhetoric away from credit claiming and towards rhetoric that was critical of stimulus spending. This criticism undermines legislators' credit claiming efforts. Not only does calling an expenditure wasteful decrease support for legislators when the criticism accompanies legislators' credit claiming efforts, it also causes constituents to change how they evaluate their representative's previous credit claiming efforts.

The evidence we present characterizes how representation occurs around federal spending: through a dynamic process, with legislators anticipating how constituents will react to particular kinds of messages, constituents rewarding legislators for their credit claiming statements, and other actors attempting to affect how legislators cultivate this support (Mansbridge, 2003; Disch, 2012). Because legislators are entrepreneurial and anticipate constituent reactions, constituents are able to exercise indirect control over legislators (Ashworth, 2012), though the form of this control is distinct from the usual notions of control in ideological representation (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Achen, 1978; Bafumi and Herron, 2010). A large literature seeks to

measure how well legislators align with constituents' stated political preferences. This literature provides insights into how well legislators adopt constituent preferences, but is a less useful framework for studying how representation around spending occurs. Rather, the representation process that we describe occurs as legislators engage in marketing campaigns to cultivate support with constituents who may struggle to articulate clear preferences about spending should occur (Mansbridge, 2003; Ashworth, 2012), but are able to evaluate credit claiming messages when presented with information. Because legislators anticipate how constituents will react to the messages and related expenditures, constituents can have their preferences realized in the expenditure process—even if constituents would struggle to articulate those preferences. This process creates new challenges for assessing how well the system performs normatively, as proximity in an ideological space will not provide strong guidance on the performance of legislators in this kind of representation.

The dynamic and interactive process of representation presentation legislators with opportunities to engage in actions that we might think are normatively bad for representation. But, as we argue throughout the book, the same actions may lead to positive policy consequences. How we balance the two considerations depends on the priorities we set for representation. Some normative theorists, such as Kantians and deliberative democrats, argue that complete transparency and truthfulness are essential for normatively desirable outcomes (Kant, 1983; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Mansbridge, 2003). If we prioritize these considerations, we may adopt a more negative assessment of the health of representation around spending. We might label legislators' efforts to influence the terms of evaluation as manipulation—exercising undue influence on constituent evaluations. Perhaps even more troubling, legislators some-

times engage in subtle deceptions, implying they deserve credit for an expenditure they had only an indirect role in securing, or that spending is imminent when really actual expenditures are unlikely to reach the district soon. Some political philosophers would object to this deception because they argue decision should be made based on reason and that deception eliminates the opportunity for others to share in our reasoning (Kant, 1983). Deliberative democrats may object because deception allows for manipulation, which is antithetical to effective deliberation (Mansbridge, 2003; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996).

If we adopt different standards for evaluating representation around spending, however, we might say the deception is justified. Legislators' deceptions about competitive grants make the program valuable to incumbents, ensuring the programs' continued existence. This helps solve a persistent problem in the design of political institutions. Political scientists have worried that legislators will use political considerations to affect government spending, directing money away from projects that would be more efficient (Ferejohn, 1974; Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen, 1981; Lee, 2003*b*; Evans, 2004). In this case the lack of legislative influence over expenditures ensures a more efficient allocation of expenditures. And the ability of legislators to receive credit for the expenditures ensures that the program is politically robust. Likewise, rewarding legislators throughout the appropriations process may increase effort to deliver money to the district—even if those expenditures are still distant or unlikely to reach the district. Because legislators must work in a broad appropriations process, effort in expenditures would yield only an uncertain payoff if based solely on expenditures as they happen in the district. But rewarding legislators throughout the process removes the uncertainty, perhaps increasing the potential return from effort

in the institution.

The different standards for spending decisions also reveals the role of a legislator's effort in representation on spending. Political economy models of representation often assume that constituents attempt to infer how hard representatives work to direct spending to the district, or an indicator of legislator competence (Ashworth, 2012). Our work reveals that constituents do reward effort in securing spending. But ideological constituents may reward legislators for effort invested outside of spending, rewarding legislators for effort expended to advance partisan positions or even to stall particularistic spending. And we show how constituents may prefer spending institutions where legislators exert less effort, though still receive credit for the spending. The result is that the effort legislators exert in securing money may have little relationship with the health of representation.

Not only do our findings clarify how representation occurs around spending, it also demonstrates the contingent value of claiming credit for particularistic expenditures for legislators. The value of credit claiming varies for legislators because they represent different kinds of constituents, who have varied responses to legislators' credit claiming efforts. This creates variant incentives for legislators to engage in credit claiming. The value of credit claiming is also contingent on how others talk about spending and how loudly others criticize particularistic spending. In the absence of vocal criticism about the wastefulness of spending, we show that legislators from both parties are able to cultivate a personal vote for spending. Criticism about spending, however, undermines the value of credit claiming opportunities for legislators. And this criticism also dampens the rate of legislators' credit claiming and the value of pork to entice legislators to join coalitions.

The findings in this book provide an expansive characterization of how legislators claim credit for spending and how this affects constituent credit allocation. To do this, we make use of new data, introduce new statistical techniques, and deploy new experimental designs. To measure how legislators claim credit for spending we use a new collection of nearly 170,000 House press releases—every press release, from each House office from 2005 to 2010. To measure the content of the press releases using text as data methods, providing efficient means for identifying press releases that claim credit for spending. To uncover the effects of the credit claiming statements we introduce new experimental designs that enables us to isolate how features of legislators’ credit claiming messages affect constituent credit allocation.

The collection of press releases enables us to capture legislators’ credit claiming efforts and our experiments ensure that we can isolate the effects of messages once they reach constituents. What remains to show is that our argument captures how credit claiming actually occurs outside of experiments: that our results are externally valid. We attempt to demonstrate the external validity of our results in several ways. We use other survey evidence to link the credit claiming rates in our studies with constituents actual evaluations of their legislators. This reveals a persistent relationship between legislators’ credit claiming rates and constituents’ evaluations of their representatives. We provide other evidence about how constituents consume information from legislators—not just press releases, but also individual level data on social media posts. And finally, we use case studies to illuminate how legislators think they are affecting constituents’ beliefs. The evidence we present suggests that the type of process we document in this book occurs broadly. Like other studies in observational social science, we are unable to definitively (and conclusively) demonstrate the

external validity of our findings, we provide evidence that suggests our findings are important.

In this book we document how legislators use credit claiming to ensure they receive credit from constituents. Of course, we do not view as the only way spending may develop support in the district, because some constituents are particularly motivated to track spending decisions. For example, owners of construction companies are likely to track additional highway expenditures and local elected officials may have more intimate knowledge of local budgets, so they may be more responsive to the size of the grants. Our focus, however, is on the audience for legislators' credit claiming messages—how legislators use credit claiming statements to cultivate broader support with their reelection constituency (Fenno, 1978).

When legislators engage in credit claiming they cultivate an impression of influence over expenditures and attempt to build a personal vote with constituents. To illustrate how this process works, and how legislators use credit claiming as part of a broader rhetorical strategy, we examine how Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin used credit claiming to bolster support in South Dakota—and how this credit claiming became a liability when attacked by an anti-spending Republican.

1.2 Creating a Personal Vote with Credit Claiming

In 2002, Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin—a Democrat from South Dakota—narrowly lost election to the state's lone seat in the House of Representatives to Bill Jankalow, who was serving as governor of the state. But Herseth-Sandlin would soon have an

opportunity to claim the seat. Bill Jankalow was forced to resign his seat in Congress after a vehicular manslaughter conviction. Herseth-Sandlin ran and won in the June 2004 special election over Larry Diedrich, securing 51% of the vote. She faced Diedrich again in the regularly November election, narrowly expanding her support to 53% of the vote. By winning the November election, Herseth-Sandlin would join the 109th Congress as South Dakota's lone representative in the House, equipped with the power of incumbency and a full term in office to expand her electoral base.

To use the office to build support, however, Herseth-Sandlin would need to tailor to her constituents—and in particular moderates who supported the Republican party in national elections. While South Dakota voters tend to elect both Democrats and Republicans to Congress, it is solidly Republican in presidential elections. Recent elections have seen dismal returns for Democratic presidential candidates— John Kerry carried only 39.1% of the two-party vote in 2004 and Barack Obama won only 45.9% of the vote in 2008 and 39% in 2012. The recent results closely follow a long historical trend: since 1932 only two Democratic presidential candidate have won the state. The presidential results reflect the ideological views of South Dakota voters, who are known as morally conservative, agrarian, and pragmatic. And polls confirm a sizeable Republican advantage in party identification: over 47% of the state identifies as a Republican, while 38% identify as Democrats (Jones, 2011).

Herseth-Sandlin would also need to maintain the support of her Democratic base, many of whom reside on Indian reservations in some of the poorest counties in America. For example, Shannon County, which contains the Pine Ridge Indian reservation, is the most Democratic county in the country—with over 90% of the voters supporting Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012—it also one of the poorest. It has a median

household income around \$25,000 and over 53% of the residents fall below the federal poverty line (Census, 2013). Other Democratic counties in the state have a similar profile. They contain impoverished reservations, full of Democratic voters who need federal funds to help compensate for the lack of local funds. Some liberal enclaves are found in the more urban areas, such as Sioux Falls and Rapid City, but Democratic votes are known to come from the poorer counties.

To cultivate support among both the poor Democrats in her base and the independents necessary to bolster her appeal, Herseth-Sandlin cultivated an impression of influence—creating a reputation as effective at delivering money to the district. Herseth-Sandlin would regularly appear in the district, issue statements from her office, and issue newsletters to clarify to make sure that constituents would attribute responsibility for spending in the state to her. To create a reputation as effective at delivering money to the district, Herseth-Sandlin made use of a broad set of expenditures at many different stages in the appropriations process. She sometimes claimed credit for expenditures as construction on a project began. For example, Herseth-Sandlin attended a ground breaking ceremony for a \$29 million dollar renovation of the South Dakota National Guard Headquarters. At the ceremony, Herseth-Sandlin praised the investment, stating that “it represents an eye towards the future” (Kokesh, 2009). She also claimed credit for spending that was still far from the state—including a \$1.3 million earmark to improve an airfield, that had only recently passed only in the House (Herseth-Sandlin, 2009*a*) and money for the South Dakota School of Mines in a recently passed House bill (Herseth, 2006*b*). Herseth-Sandlin also claimed credit for projects that had only passed out of committee and not yet out of the House. For example, she used a press release to announce “that significant funding for several

South Dakota priorities has passed the House Appropriations Committee”, though had not yet been voted on by the full House (Herseth, 2005*b*). Other times, Herseth-Sandlin claimed credit for merely requesting that funding be directed to the state. One newspaper story describes how she asked for \$150 million in funds to manage forests in South Dakota. Herseth-Sandlin justified the requested expenditure, arguing that “Using even a small portion of the Forests Service’s...funds for the timber program will help to create jobs in rural areas, cut down on catastrophic wildfires and promote healthy forests” (Staff, 2010*b*).

Herseth-Sandlin also implied that she deserved credit for expenditures that she had only an indirect role in securing. For example Herseth-Sandlin regularly claimed credit for money allocated through executive branch grant programs. This includes funds to bolster fire fighting at the Rapid City airport (Staff, 2009*a*) and money to “help ensure access to health care in rural communities in South Dakota” (Herseth, 2005*a*). Herseth-Sandlin also regularly shared the credit for projects with her Senate colleagues—Tim Johnson and John Thune (Herseth, 2006*a*) and with high ranking officials from presidential administration (Staff and Press, 2009).

To build a reputation as effective at delivering money to the state, Herseth-Sandlin claimed credit broadly for many different types of expenditures. She was particularly attentive to money allocated to Indian reservations—the poorest and most Democratic counties in South Dakota. When claiming credit for the projects, she clarified her goal of improving her constituents’ well being. For example, she claimed credit for \$3 million for housing on an Indian reservation arguing that the expenditure was needed because “affordable housing is a critical component in the development and prosperity of tribal communities” (Herseth-Sandlin, 2009*b*). Herseth-

Sandlin articulated a similar goal when announcing new highway funds for some Indian reservations—arguing that “the funding for Wakpa Sica and St. Joseph’s Indian School, as well as the paving of an important highway through the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, are key investments in Indian Country” (Herseth, 2006*c*). And when claiming credit for securing “critical funding for Indian country” in a bill that passed the House, she argued that “funding in this legislation will improve infrastructure on reservations and assist with economic development efforts by attracting investment to Indian Country” (Herseth-Sandlin, 2009*d*).

Herseth-Sandlin also claimed credit for many other types of expenditures, to cultivate support with residents throughout South Dakota. She claimed credit for law enforcement expenditures, including “more than \$5 million to hire, retain 30 police officers” (Herseth-Sandlin, 2009*c*) and “\$250,000 for Methamphetamine Awareness and Prevention Project” (Herseth, 2005*c*). She also claimed credit for infrastructure improvements, including \$22 million for the Lewis and Clark Water Project and \$32 million for the Mni Wiconi project. Herseth-Sandlin explained that the projects were vital, because “The importance of a clean, reliable source of drinking water to rural economies can not be overstated” (Herseth, 2006*a*). She even claimed credit for funds that would help her constituents during the winter. In one press release, she “announced...more than \$629,000 specifically for heating communities in South Dakota” (Herseth, 2006*d*) and in another she “announced that South Dakota will receive an additional \$620,264 in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program” (Herseth-Sandlin, 2008).

Herseth-Sandlin used public statements, appearances, and press releases to make the case that she was an effective advocate for South Dakota. This was part of

Herseth-Sandlin's broader strategy in Congress to appeal to independents and moderate Republicans. As a blue dog Democrat she often voted against her party. She declared publicly that "I've worked with both political parties. I've stood up to both political parties to do what's right for South Dakota" (Brokaw, 2010). After her reelection in 2006 she declared that her win is "an affirmation of the idea that South Dakotans expect and deserve representation from the center, not the ideological extremes" (Lammers, 2006). Indeed, Herseth-Sandlin's non-partisan reputation was so effective that local newspapers would occasionally misidentify her as a Republican (Staff, 2006*a*).

For Herseth-Sandlin's first two terms in office her strategy worked. Her base of support grew in the 2006 and 2008 elections, capturing over 67% of the vote in both elections. Exit polls in the 2008 election reveal how effectively she grew her support. She maintained her high level of support among Democrats—securing 94% of the vote—while also securing 72% of the independent vote and even 40% of the Republican votes (Staff, 2008*a*). After outperforming Obama by almost 23 percentage points in the 2008 election, political pundits viewed Herseth-Sandlin's seat as safe for the upcoming midterm elections.

But Herseth-Sandlin's strength—a reputation as delivering federal money to her state—would become a liability in the 2010 midterm elections. After Barack Obama's election in 2008, the Republican base and political elites mobilized in opposition to stimulus spending measures and proposed policy reforms—such as the Affordable Care Act, financial reform, and cap and trade environmental regulations. The emergence of "Tea Party" Republicans attacked Democrats for expenditures, arguing that the particularistic district spending was wasteful—an attempt to undermine the value

of spending to cultivate a personal vote.

In the 2010 midterm elections Herseth-Sandlin faced Kristi Noem—a South Dakota legislator and member of the Tea Party. Noem’s campaign worked to undermine Herseth-Sandlin’s reputation as a non-partisan advocate for South Dakota. Rather than a moderate legislator, Noem portrayed Herseth-Sandlin as a liberal who supported Nancy Pelosi. At one debate, Noem asked Herseth-Sandlin “In 2005 you voted for Nancy Pelosi [for speaker], again in 2007, and again in 2009. If you had the opportunity to represent South Dakota again in the House, would you vote for Nancy Pelosi again?” At the same time, Noem attacked Herseth-Sandlin for contributing to “out of control” spending in Washington. Noem’s campaign regularly remarked that Herseth-Sandlin was far from a fiscal conservative and that “South Dakotans are frustrated with politicians in Washington spending like there is no tomorrow” (Palmer, 2010). Noem’s attacks forced Herseth-Sandlin to work even harder to portray herself as a moderate. And this further eroded Herseth-Sandlin’s already diminished support among the relative small group of liberal South Dakotans. At a McGovern day event—an annual event for the South Dakota Democratic party—several audience members refused to hold Herseth-Sandlin signs, to protest her increasingly moderate positions (Woster, 2010).

Noem’s campaign was successful—securing a narrow 7,000 vote margin of victory over Herseth-Sandlin. Noem’s victory—and Herseth-Sandlin’s attempts to hold her seat during an election that favored Republicans—reveals trade offs in how legislators can use particularistic spending to cultivate support. Legislators can engage in credit claiming to cultivate support with poor constituents and opposing partisan voters. But this risks alienating ideological partisan. And claiming credit for spending also

creates a risk that a legislator will be portrayed as fiscally irresponsible and undermine her ability to use credit claiming to cultivate support.

1.3 The Impression of Influence: Previewing Our Argument

Herseth-Sandlin's broad credit claiming efforts are indicative of how legislators create an impression of influence over expenditures and how representation occurs around federal spending. Across Congressional districts the credit claiming occurs regularly. Building off of the intuition of cases like Herseth-Sandlin, we characterize legislator credit claiming across all House members—how often legislators claim credit for spending, what they claim credit for obtaining, and how much legislators obtain. We then use a series of experiments to show how constituents allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages—demonstrating how constituents are responsive to the actions that legislators report, but are less responsive to the amount that legislators claim credit for securing. We show how this process matters for the way the federal government spending money—demonstrating how legislators support grant programs because they provide the opportunity to announce expenditures. And how criticism of federal expenditures undermines the value of claiming credit for spending.

Our findings have broad implications about the political economy of government spending, the design of political institutions, and political representation in Congress. In this section we preview our argument and the evidence for our conclusions—that legislators cultivate an impression of influence over expenditures with credit claiming messages and this leads to a personal vote.

In Chapter 2 we explain when strategic legislators would associate themselves with spending and how constituents are likely to allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages. The complicated appropriations process makes it nearly impossible for constituents, on their own, to track their legislators' activities. This creates a need for legislators to explain their work to constituents. Reelection oriented legislators face a trade off between adopting a non-partisan reputation as an effective advocate for the district or a partisan who effectively advocates for the district. Who legislators represent affects how legislators balance these considerations in their public messages. When legislators claim credit for spending constituents tend to be responsive, but lack both the context and information necessary to be responsive to the amount legislators claim credit for securing. Instead, constituents will seize on information they are better equipped to evaluate—the action legislators report, the recipient of the expenditure, and the purported benefits.

In Chapter 3 we characterize legislators' credit claiming efforts—demonstrating how often legislators claim credit for spending, what legislators claim credit for securing, and the amount secured. We develop accurate measures of legislators' credit claiming rate and then show how legislators' credit claiming strategies reflect the types of districts they represent. Legislators with the greatest incentive to cultivate a personal vote credit claim more often than colleagues who can win reelection with appeals to their partisan base. We also illuminate how members of Congress claim credit broadly and not just for money that is earmarked during the appropriations process. This includes claiming credit for requests made during the appropriations process—even if the expenditures only have a small chance to actually reach the district. Legislators also claim credit for more than funds earmarked during the appro-

priations process. They also claim credit for grants that executive agencies allocate. And legislators claim credit for relatively small amounts of money—often claiming credit for expenditures that appear inconsequential relative to the federal budget.

We then show the distinct effects of legislators’ credit claiming messages. In Chapter 4 we demonstrate that legislators’ credit claiming efforts do more than simply bolster name recognition—they also cultivate an impression of influence over federal funds. We report the results of an experiment conducted on a major social media website, where we show that constituents regularly receive messages like the ones we use in our experiment from their member of Congress. Using our experimental design, we show that credit claiming messages do make constituents more familiar with their representative, but the credit claiming messages also lead constituents to infer their legislator is more effective at delivering money to the district. The result is that credit claiming messages cause a larger increase in overall support than other types of messages.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how credit claiming messages cause this larger increase in support. We present the results of a series of experiments that show constituents are much more responsive to the action that legislators report and the type of expenditure and much less responsive to the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing. Constituents allocate nearly identical credit for securing an expenditure during the appropriations process and merely requesting an expenditure. This occurs even though constituents believe that money that has already been secured is more likely to reach the district. Constituents are responsive to the type of expenditure legislators claim credit for securing, but are largely unresponsive to even large increases in the amount of money allocated to a project. In an experiment conducted

over several days, we show that increasing the number of credit claiming messages legislators support has a much larger effect on constituent credit allocation than increasing the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing. We then show that the relationship we describe in our experiments appears to occur with actual representatives. Using legislators' actual credit claiming rates we find a relationship between higher rates of credit claiming for money and constituents perceiving their representative as more effective at delivering money to the district.

Legislators, therefore, have reason to value the opportunity to claim credit for spending, even if they are unable to influence the disbursement of funds. In Chapter 6 we show how legislators—with the help of a subtle linguistic deception and strategic bureaucrats—claim credit for grants that the representative exercised little direct effort in securing. Bureaucrats create credit claiming opportunities to cultivate support for their program, particularly when the bureaucrats are otherwise unable to manipulate grant decisions. Legislators take advantage of the opportunity to announce the expenditure, while never literally taking credit. We use an experiment to show this linguistic deception is effective—constituents believe that legislators who only “announce” a grant are responsible for securing it. Once we reveal that legislators are only implying they deserve credit, however, their credit is decimated. The credit claiming opportunities are also effective for bureaucrats—members of Congress who take advantage of the opportunities defend the agency when their budget is threatened.

Legislators use rhetoric to ensure they receive credit from constituents for spending and that constituents evaluate the expenditures positively. This leaves legislators open to attacks from opponents and members of other parties who might use the

credit claiming as evidence that a legislator is fiscally irresponsible. We show how this has manifested in recent politics. In February 2009 Republican activists mobilized to oppose the Obama administration’s policies and to oppose what they viewed as oppressive government overreach—creating the Tea Party movement. As we show in Chapter 7, the emergence of the Tea Party movement corresponds with a spike in anti-spending rhetoric among Congressional Republicans, who criticized particularistic projects that legislators use to cultivate a personal vote. We use two experiments to show how this criticism undermines credit for spending, causing constituents to be much less supportive of expenditures in the district. And we show that the effect of the criticism extends beyond the experiment. We show how once budget criticism is introduced, it causes constituents to evaluate legislators who actually claim credit at a higher rate to be viewed more negatively.

In Chapter 8 we conclude. There we argue that the implications of our argument for political representation depends on the features of representation we prioritize. If we prioritize truthful and transparent discussion then the credit claiming, credit allocation process creates distortion in representation. And we suggest some reforms in reporting and Congressional credit claiming that could make the process more transparent and limit legislators’ ability to engage in systematic deception. But if we prioritize the consequences of the credit claiming, then the process we describe may work well—incentivizing legislators to work throughout the appropriations process and ensuring legislators support competitive grant programs. We also explain how our work could be extended and highlight yet to be answered questions about how legislators build support.

1.4 Conclusion

The credit claiming, credit allocation process that we describe is at the heart of American political representation. It also reveals the dynamic way in which representation often occurs in a democracy (Arnold, 1992; Mansbridge, 2003; Ashworth, 2012). Legislators make the case why they are responsible for government actions and to make the case why constituents should reward the legislator for those actions. Constituents, in turn, evaluate and respond to the messages. When legislators engage in this credit claiming, they act as entrepreneurs. They anticipate how constituents will react and attempt to tailor their message to create support.

This process ensures that constituents exercise control over their legislator's actions—though this is not the reactive control common in quantitative models of ideological political representation (Miller and Stokes, 1963). Throughout this book we examine the implications of legislators' entrepreneurial activities for representation and legislators' personal vote. Legislators' marketing efforts enable them to influence the terms of evaluation and to receive credit for activities that constituents might otherwise never associate with a representative. It also creates new possibilities for institutional design and risks when politicians criticize spending as wasteful. We begin this examination in the next chapter, where we explain when and how legislators engage in credit claiming and how constituents respond to legislators' credit claiming efforts.

Chapter 2

Solving the Representative's Problem and Creating the Representative's Opportunity

When at home in their district, legislators often use their public appearances to announce new grants, or to celebrate the completion of spending projects. Consider, for example, Pete Visclosky (D-IN)—a long time Democrat incumbent from northwest Indiana. On November 11, 2011 Visclosky was in Gary, Indiana for a ribbon cutting ceremony for a bike trail along Lake Michigan's southern shore. At the ceremony, Visclosky praised the trail as "a wise investment of our tax dollars—improving the quality of life and the health of everyone who lives in our communities." The bike trail was an investment made with the help of an earmark inserted in a 2004 Appropriations bill. His appearance at the ribbon cutting is indicative of how Visclosky spends his time in the district. A few months prior to the ribbon cutting ceremony in Gary, Visclosky broke ground at another bike trail, further south in his district in the

small town of Schererville (Rico, 2011). The funding for this project was allocated in a 2007 grant which, as Visclosky explained, was “for park expansion and improvements” (Visclosky, 2007). Even sewer projects—with the Army Corps of Engineers deciding on the funding—are celebrated with an appearance from Visclosky. At one groundbreaking in the blue collar town of Whiting, Visclosky explained that “the installation of these sewer improvements will create good-paying jobs for Northwest Indiana” (Lavery, 2012).

Pete Visclosky’s appearances in his district are part of an effort to receive credit for federal projects. Visclosky uses his public appearances to draw attention to the expenditures, to explain that he is at least partly responsible for delivering the money to the district, and that the projects are useful to local communities. The complicated federal expenditure process makes it necessary for Visclosky to engage in credit claiming to ensure constituents allocate credit for district spending. Sometimes there are long delays from allocation of funds to actual expenditure. For example, Visclosky had to wait seven years—and several elections—to cut the ribbon for the bike trail in Gary and four years to break ground on the bike trail in Schererville. In other instances federal expenditures are coupled with local expenditures, obscuring the federal government’s role in directing money to the district. For example, the Army Corps of Engineers provided primary funding for the sewer in Whiting, but it was also partially funded by the city.

The complicated expenditure process makes it hard for legislators to track spending, let alone for constituents to tally expenditures in the district (Lee, 2003*b*). The structure of representation exacerbates this problem. Constituents lack the incentive to track the complicated expenditures. A large literature in political science has doc-

umented how constituents have little incentive to acquire new information on their own (Downs, 1957). And even if constituents did happen to acquire information on local spending, it is unclear how they would evaluate that information. This is hardly a critique of the American public's democratic competence. Rather, it is a recognition that to understand how spending will affect a local community often requires technocratic knowledge that no one would expect constituents to hold.

Visclosky uses his public appearances to overcome what we call the *representative's problem* in American democracy. The perquisites of office give incumbents resources to build an incumbency advantage, but incumbents have to use the resources to gain the attention of largely inattentive constituents. Visclosky's appearances in the district demonstrate how legislators solve this problem: rather than rely on constituents to learn on their own about what their legislator does while in office, representatives how they are responsible for spending that occurs in the district. To receive credit for directing funds to the district, legislators use credit claiming statements to create the impression of influence over expenditures among constituents—to cultivate a reputation as effective at delivering money to the district. Constituents, in turn, respond to the messages—legislators messages affect constituents' long-run evaluations of their member of Congress.

The credit claiming, credit allocation process that we document often turns the representative's problem into the representative's opportunity. It enables legislators to claim credit broadly—ensuring legislators can argue they are responsible for much more than spending as it occurs in the district. Representatives use statements to claim credit for expenditures that are still far removed from the district, expenditures that have only a chance of actually occurring, and even for expenditures a represen-

tative has merely requested be allocated to the district. And legislators are able to receive credit for a wide array of expenditures—much more than just earmarked money in appropriations bills. Legislators are able to imply they are responsible for money they had only an indirect role in securing, even if legislators had little direct influence over those expenditures.

Legislators credit claiming messages are effective—constituents allocate credit in response to legislators’ credit claiming messages. But constituents tend to focus on the actions that legislators report and the recipients of the expenditure, rather than the amount of money that legislators report securing. This occurs because constituents often lack the context to assess how levels of spending will affect local interests and needs. Even if constituents had the context, however, there are psychological mechanisms that make it hard for constituents to reward legislators for the amount secured. Constituents tend to evaluate credit claiming messages rapidly, making it hard for them to identify and evaluate numerical information. In contrast, constituents are well equipped to assess a legislator’s action on an expenditure, the recipient, and the reported benefits.

In this chapter we introduce our argument about how legislators claim credit for federal projects and how, in turn, constituents allocate credit. We provide a mechanism to explain how federal expenditures in the district lead to legislator support, complimenting existing studies on federal expenditures (Levitt and Snyder, 1997; Strömberg, 2004; Chen and Malhotra, 2007; Shepsle et al., 2009). We also show how actions that could potentially lead to expenditures can cultivate support support for legislators. This implies that spending can have a loose relationship with legislators’ electoral support and still be an important component of the personal vote. Expen-

ditures and credit claiming together lead to increased support, but spending alone is unlikely to be noticed and unlikely to lead to increased support. This is because constituents, on their own, are unlikely to reward legislators for federal expenditures. We begin this chapter by explaining why it is so hard for constituents to learn about spending.

2.1 The Representative's Problem

Legislators' primary goal is to be reelected—Mayhew (1974) famously characterized representatives as “single-minded seekers of reelection”. Of course legislators also have other goals—they want to influence, be powerful in Congress, obtain a higher office, or even secure personal wealth. But reelection is the primary goal, a necessary condition to achieve many of legislators' other broader goals. Political scientists often argue that legislators perform actions in Congress to bolster support with constituents to pursue reelection. And legislators have a wide array of tools to cultivate support. They may cast votes that align with district opinion (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Achen, 1978; Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan, 2002), perform constituency service (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987), or invest in work in Congress that advocates district interest (Hall, 1996).

The problem for legislators is that constituents, on their own, are unlikely to learn about many of these activities. Legislators may faithfully work to build constituent support, but constituents may fail to reward legislators simply because they never have the chance to learn about the work. This problem arises as a natural and intended consequence of the structure of political representation in republican governments (Madison, 1787). Constituents delegate authority to elected officials, who

use the authority to govern. This enables constituents to attend to other tasks, but it limits their ability to track what their many elected officials do while in office.

The representative’s problem—that work done in Congress to build support may go unnoticed—is also a problem for constituents (Ashworth, 2012). A common assumption in models of representation is that constituents want legislators who are accountable to constituents—representatives who take actions that align with constituents’ interests and exert effort to enact policies constituents prefer (Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita, 2006; Daley and Snowberg, 2011; Ashworth, 2012). The risk for constituents is that they may select a legislator who has priorities or positions that are misaligned with the district, legislators who exert little effort while in office (Ashworth, 2005) or representatives who pander to secure reelection (Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts, 2001). The inability of constituents to monitor legislators is an intended consequence of a republican political system (Madison, 1787) or any other instance of delegation, rather than evidence of a deficient citizenry.

The representative’s problem is particularly pressing in federal spending. Both politicians and political scientists recognize the electoral value of delivering pork to the district (Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen, 1981; Stein and Bickers, 1994; Levitt and Snyder, 1997), but spending is also one of the most difficult activities for constituents to track. The complicated and decentralized way federal disbursements occurs makes tabulating total district expenditures difficult for members of Congress, let alone constituents. Lee (2003*b*) argues that this is difficult for House members “[b]ecause House districts are not administrative units in the federal system, systematic data on the amount of money they receive in federal grants is difficult to obtain” (Lee, 2003*b*, 715). It is also difficult for House members to tabulate expenditures in any year,

because there can be a lengthy delay between when funds are earmarked or a grant allocated and an actual expenditure is made in the district. Further, the amount set aside in an expenditure process nearly always differs from the amount actually spent. When accumulated over several spending bills, this difference can be substantial. For example, in August 2012 the Obama administration announced a plan to spend \$470 million in funds earmarked in transportation bills passed from 2003-2006 that had not yet been spent—either because projects were completed under the allocated budget or because delays had caused long planned projects to not yet start.

Even if constituents could tabulate the exact amount of particularistic spending in a district in a particular year, constituents struggle to recognize whether expenditures made in the district originated with the federal government (Mettler, 2011). Mettler (2011) characterizes a wide array of federal programs as creating a “subterranean state”: government spending that is not obviously connected with the government. This obscures the federal government’s role in expenditures, making it less likely constituents—on their own—connect projects in the district with expenditures in Washington. For example, firefighters hired with federal grants are indistinguishable from other firefighters hired with funds from a municipal budget, and educational equipment purchased with educational grants are difficult to distinguish from other equipment in schools.

The complicated coordination between federal, state, and local officials to disburse funds makes it even more difficult for constituents to identify federal spending and attribute it to legislators. Consider, for example, the allocation of highway funds. The money used to build and repair roads come from many sources and with differing levels of coordination across levels of government. The bulk of highway funds are

allocated through a formula process, which provides local and state officials substantial control over how the funds are spent. Members of Congress approve formulas for states to build highways—based on the needs of the state and the amount paid in highway related taxes (Martin, 2012). Once the money has been allocated to a state, state and local officials decide where to direct the funding and how to pay for the matching expenditures (Shirley, 2011). But other ways of allocating money afford state officials less direct control. Legislators, at least prior to reforms to the process in the 112th Congress, would include funding for specific highway projects in appropriations bills. Certainly local official and state officials help identify areas of need for such projects, but members of Congress are given the most control over where the the earmarked money is directed. Other expenditures can occur without the direct intervention of local officials or a Congressional delegation. The Department of Transportation can use its discretion to target projects (Shirley, 2011; Kriner and Reeves, 2012). With just highway spending there is substantial variation in who is responsible for securing money and directing where it is spent. Across other programs there is even more variation—and more ambiguity—about who deserves credit for spending that occurs in the district. Some programs we describe later in the book (see Chapter 6) allocate expenditures through a competitive process with little legislator involvement. Other expenditures, including Army Corps of Engineers projects, more directly involve legislators (Ferejohn, 1974; Arnold, 1992).

And even if constituents were able to tabulate expenditures and attribute responsibility to legislators appropriately, they might still struggle to allocate credit. Constituents generally lack the context necessary to assess the size of expenditures. After all, we would expect few residents in a town to know how much money is neces-

sary for a local fire department to buy new gear, for a local police station to purchase bulletproof vests, or to repave local highways. Constituents also lack the incentive to think carefully about the expenditures—resulting in psychological processes that make incorporating information about the size of expenditures in evaluations difficult.

Constituents, then, are unable to account for spending on their own in the district. This creates a problem for legislators, who would use expenditures in the district to cultivate a personal vote and to grow an incumbency advantage. We now explain how legislators turn this problem into an opportunity, to receive credit for much more than spending that occurs in the district.

2.2 The Representative’s Opportunity: The Credit Claiming, Credit Allocation Process

Legislators use credit claiming statements to shape constituents’ impressions of their representative’s influence over federal expenditures. As David Mayhew (1974) first defined, credit claiming is “acting so as to *generate a belief* in a relevant political actor...that one is personally responsible for causing the government...to do something that the actor considers desirable” (Mayhew, 1974, 52-53) (emphasis added). Credit claiming statements help constituents complete the difficult task of learning about expenditures in the district and attributing responsibility. Of course, helping constituents learn about the expenditure benefits the legislator.

An example credit claiming statement, from Hal Rogers (R-KY), illuminates how. In the summer of 2009, Rogers released a press release that began:

U.S. Congressman Harold “Hal” Rogers (KY-05) announced today that

the House of Representatives has approved \$5 million to continue retrofitting U.S. Army helicopters with leak proof transmission fluid drip pans for the HH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter that are produced by workers at Phoenix Products in McKee. Rogers secured this funding in H.R. 3326, the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, which passed the House of Representatives on July 30, 2009 and is awaiting further action by the Senate. (Rogers, 2009c)

Rogers provides information about the expenditure, ensuring constituents do not have to acquire information themselves. He also tries to “generate a belief” that he is responsible for securing the expenditure, informing constituents that he “secured this funding” in a Defense Appropriations Bill. And Rogers makes clear that constituents should consider this expenditure desirable. Later in the press release Rogers explains that “[t]he drip pans...have a strong reputation for quality and durability which is essential to keeping this Army air workhorse maintenance free and ensuring these aircraft are safe in the skies over Afghanistan” (Rogers, 2009c).¹

Legislators use credit claiming statements to associate themselves with spending in the district and to ensure they receive credit for expenditures. We now explain when and how legislators engage in credit claiming and how, in turn, constituents allocate credit.

¹Of course, credit claiming can go well beyond public statements. Many members of Congress regularly attend ground breaking ceremonies, ribbon cutting events, or make public appearances to appear responsible for money spent in the district. In each instance, legislators are ensuring constituents associate projects with the representative.

2.2.1 Credit Claiming: How Legislators Create an Impression of Influence

Legislators use public statements to explain how they represent their constituents while in office, defining to constituents the type of representation their legislator provides them (Grimmer, 2013). While communication is often conceptualized as cheap talk, legislators are constrained in how many public statements they can make effectively. Part of the constraint comes from limited staff resources. Communications staff are experts at composing messages, but still require time to compose effective messages for a legislator. The constraints also come from the audience. Newspaper editors have only limited space available for Congressional news and have a limit on the number of stories they will publish from any one legislator. Even more direct communication has limits. Franking rules limit the number of newsletters legislators can send during a term. And constituents' attention limits the number of stories that can be included in e-newsletters. Legislators, therefore, have only a limited number of opportunities to make an impression with constituents.

The limited number of possible messages forces legislators to face trade offs when deciding what to say to constituents. Both recent theoretical and empirical work describe a trade off between emphasizing work done to deliver money to the district—claiming credit for expenditures that occur in the district—and broader national policies—articulating positions on salient policy debates (Groseclose, 2001; Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita, 2006; Dropp and Peskowitz, 2012; Wichowsky, 2012; Grimmer, 2013). When legislators articulate credit claiming positions they portray themselves as non-partisan advocates for their district. This provides legislators an opportunity to cultivate valence, or a personal vote—support that is not based on the

representative's ideological position nor their partisan affiliation (Fiorina, 1977; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987; Stein and Bickers, 1994). When credit claiming for district spending, however, legislators forgo the chance to portray themselves as effective representatives on broader national policy debates. Instead of credit claiming, legislators may articulate positions on proposed policy changes. This ensures legislators can remind their constituents about their representative's partisan affiliation and clarifies the legislator's positions on major national political events.

Previous work on Congressional communication demonstrates the prominence of the credit claiming, position taking trade off in Senators' presentational styles—how they define the type of representation they provide constituents. Using a text as data method that discovers presentational style categories and a new collection of Senate press releases, Grimmer (2013) shows that senators' presentational styles lie on a credit claiming, position taking spectrum. At one of the spectrum are Position Takers—senators who engage in the most prominent national policy debate, but tend to avoid engaging in credit claiming. At the other extreme of the spectrum are Appropriators: senators who engage in credit claiming for state spending and rarely take positions on prominent policy debates. Between the two extremes are legislators who blend the two styles—striking a balance between engaging in broad national policy debates and claiming credit for local spending.

When deciding how to present their work to constituents, legislators must decide how to balance credit claiming and position-taking. And because legislators' primary motivation is reelection, we expect that who legislators represent will influence how their rate of credit claiming—legislators will engage in credit claiming when the relative electoral return is high (Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita, 2006). The district's

demographic characteristics will affect the return on credit claiming messages. Low income districts are particularly reliant on federal spending to provide basic services. Constituents who live in low income districts rely on basic services provided through block grants that fund basic public services like bus-lines, subsidized housing, or rural development grants. The popularity of the programs within the district creates incentives for legislators to clarify to their constituents that their representative is responsible for providing the funding for the vital services. In higher income districts, however, voters have a less clear relationship with much of the spending (Mettler, 2011). The result is that the district demand for particularistic spending decreases with income. Similarly, legislators who represent districts with lower education have an incentive to engage in credit claiming. Lower education constituents tend to be less attentive to salient partisan and ideological debates, making claiming credit for spending more valuable (Campbell et al., 1960; Lauderdale, 2013). Other demographic characteristics—such as the type of jobs residents hold—create demand for spending. For example, districts with a large concentration of union workers have constituents who are better equipped to recognize a personal value in credit claiming messages. Union construction workers recognize that highway funds create jobs and public sector employees often depend on grant spending for hiring and equipment purchases.

The partisan composition of a district is likely to have an even more potent effect on the relative electoral return of credit claiming (Grimmer, 2013). Marginal legislators—those representing district with a large share of opposing partisans—have greater incentive to engage in credit claiming than more aligned representatives—those who represent districts with a large share of co-partisans. For marginal legisla-

tors to win a general election, they have to obtain the support of independents and even moderate members of the other party, while maintain support of their own partisan base. This makes articulating positions risky for marginal legislators. Clarifying positions in line with their party risks alienating members of the other party, while emphasizing positions that align with the other party risks alienating their copartisans. Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin faced this problem in her 2010 reelection campaign. Facing a conservative electorate, Herseth-Sandlin cast a vote against the Affordable Care Act, and regularly referenced her vote against the healthcare reform on the campaign trail. The opposition to the reform blocked a potential attack from her opponent. But it also demobilized her partisan base and nearly prompted a primary challenge from a liberal South Dakota doctor.

Credit claiming gives marginal legislators the opportunity to claim credit without the risk of alienating an important component of the electorate. By announcing new projects, marginal legislators are able to portray themselves as effective advocates to the district. This allows the marginal legislators to cultivate support, without alienating their heterogenous reelection constituency.

Aligned legislators face different electoral risks. Because of the composition of their districts, more aligned legislators face both primary and general electorates with a larger share of like minded co-partisans (Brady, Han and Pope, 2007). The risk for aligned legislators, then, is not that articulating positions will alienate supporters. The risk for the more aligned legislators is that they will face an opponent in a primary election that is more ideologically extreme or more appealing to copartisan constituents. For aligned legislators, then, credit claiming is less appealing, because it does not help them to clarify their ideological positions to the base, nor demonstrate

their partisan work in the institution. To be clear, claiming credit for spending will still help ideologically extreme and aligned legislators to cultivate a personal vote. But, credit claiming is relatively less effective for aligned legislators than marginal legislators.

How legislators present their work to constituents will also be correlated with how legislators work in Washington (Grimmer, 2013). In part this occurs because the district characteristics often affect other actions legislators take or select with elections legislators who behave in line with the district’s priorities (Fenno, 1978; Hall, 1996). For example, legislators value a seat on the Appropriations committee because it enables them to be more closely associated with spending in the district. Similarly, marginal legislators tend to be more moderate than legislators well aligned with their district (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2009). And as a result we expect that legislators credit claiming propensity will be systematically related to their ideology—even if this relationship may not be causal. Legislators’ work in Washington may correlate with their credit claiming propensity because they have broad policy goals or plan to pursue higher office. In both cases, legislators will engage in broader national debates at the expense of claiming credit for local projects.

Given a rate of credit claiming, we expect that legislators will be able to claim credit for a wide array of expenditures and much more than actual spending in the district. Indeed, Mayhew (1974) suggests this in the original definition of credit claiming, where he asserted that legislators need only “generate a belief” they are responsible for the government action. We expect that legislators are able to claim credit for projects they could have plausibly influenced—even if the actual influence is only indirect. This includes expenditures long before they reach district. Even

before expenditures occur, legislators are able to explain how they used their influence to insert expenditures in spending bills, or how legislators will use their influence to request spending. Both contribute to a reputation—or impression—of influence over expenditure processes in Washington. Claiming credit throughout the process also means that legislators can claim credit many times for the same expenditures. Legislators can announce that they secured money in Washington, they can attend ground breaking ceremonies as expenditures begin, and even claim credit for projects at ribbon cutting ceremonies when a project is completed.

Not only can legislators claim credit for expenditures throughout the process, they can cultivate support with projects they had only an indirect role in securing. Bureaucrats at spending programs insulated from political influence use credit claiming opportunities to cultivate Congressional support. Legislators take advantage of the opportunities, using carefully constructed language to imply that they deserve credit for the spending. Credit claiming ensures that legislators have a broad set of plausible expenditures they can use to cultivate support—even when legislators have exerted little effort in delivering the project.

Legislators are able to claim credit broadly, for a wide array of expenditures. Representatives, however, will focus on the least controversial and most popular projects in their districts. Legislators could claim credit for more controversial funding projects—such as art projects or gun ranges. But claiming credit for funding controversial projects undermines the usefulness of engaging in credit claiming—to create a personal vote among a broad coalition of voters. More attractive to legislators, then, are recipients broadly supported among voters—such as firefighters, police officers, roads, national parks, homeland security, and local education. That legislators

anticipate constituent reaction to credit claiming about spending facilitates representation on expenditures. Legislators are motivated to claim credit for expenditures to cultivate electoral support. And therefore legislators have incentive to maintain spending programs that are popular with constituents.

Legislators act like entrepreneurs when engaging in credit claiming, anticipating how constituents will respond when deciding how to present their work to constituents. Legislators vary their credit claiming rates in response to the relative return on credit claiming. And vary the content of the credit claiming messages in response to include action that are likely to be popular and recipients likely to cultivate support. We now turn to constituents, explaining how they are likely to respond to legislators' credit claiming messages.

2.2.2 Credit Allocation: How Constituents Respond to Legislators' Credit Claiming Messages

Legislators act as entrepreneurs when engaging in credit claiming—anticipating rewards from constituents and rarely responding to explicit constituent demand. Legislators must be entrepreneurial because constituents tend to hold only vague and sometimes inconsistent preferences on government spending (Hansen, 1998). This occurs because constituents have little reason to think hard about how they government should spend money. And expansive government spending makes it nearly impossible for even the most informed constituents to hold strong preferences on how the government should allocate funds across projects.

Even though constituents lack detailed preferences on how the government should spend money, they can still react to legislators' credit claiming efforts. But the lack

of information and the limited incentives to think carefully about the credit claiming efforts causes constituents to avoid some kinds of information. This is especially true of quantitative information, like the size of expenditures that legislators are claiming credit for securing. Constituents are unlikely to know much about local budgets, so it is hard for them to know how grants to local programs will affect local services. Even if constituents had information about local budgets, they might still find it hard to identify the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing and evaluating how this affects local budgets. The result is that large increases in the dollar amounts allocated to the district may have a similar effect on support for legislators.

Voters not only lack information about expenditures, they also lack incentives to think deeply and carefully about what legislators are saying in their credit claiming statements. This causes particular psychological processes to operate that makes responsiveness to the amount of money legislators secure even more unlikely. When thinking quickly, it is difficult for our brains to identify and reason about quantitative information (Ariely, 2000; Conlisk, 1996; Kahneman, 2003). Previous studies, for example, have shown that it is difficult to rapidly evaluate large numbers and to quickly convey the differences in their magnitude (Hatano and Osawa, 1983). This is particularly true for dollar figures. We have intuitive experience with small figures, but larger expenditure figures are difficult for constituents to evaluate and to consider their relative size.

In place of the quantitative information, constituents use qualitative information—evaluating the actions that legislators report performing, the recipient of the spending, and the reported benefits. Constituents have the context to react to qualitative information in credit claiming statements. Consider the following simple thought

experiment. Suppose you learn that your local fire department will receive \$10,000. Now, suppose that you never learned of this first statement, and you find out that the local fire department will receive \$30,000. Without being able to compare the two grant sizes, would you expect that you are more excited about the \$30,000, rather than the \$10,000? Yet, it is likely that all of us would be happy that our local fire department is receiving additional funding—even though we are unable to differentiate based on the size of the expenditure.

Cognitive process accentuate the attention to qualitative information, making it more likely that constituents will evaluate the actions reported and the recipient of the expenditure, rather than the amount secured. Without substantial cognitive effort, constituents can quickly evaluate who is making a claim, what they are claiming, and the benefits of the claim. The result is that constituents are able to make a quick assessment about whether or not they think the expenditure will be beneficial for the district. Legislators provide information to make it more likely that constituents will view the expenditure positively. As the example from Hal Rogers showed earlier in the chapter, legislators use credit claiming statements to explain why allocations are beneficial for the district.

The result of the lack of information and cognitive process is that constituents reward legislators for their broad credit claiming activities. Rather than just allocating credit for actual money spent in the district or actual new projects created, we expect that constituents will allocate credit for legislators requesting money, even if the likelihood of the money reaching the district is low or very uncertain. Taken even further, we expect that constituents will reward legislators for merely stating their intention to request spending for the district. Because the action is what is

being evaluated, constituents are merely responsive to the report that their legislator is working for the district.

Constituents' focus on actions and their limited attention to money creates incentives for legislators to regularly claim credit for small expenditures, rather than occasionally claiming credit for larger projects. Numerous actions will be easy for constituents to recall, cultivating an impression that the legislators are influential over a diverse area of projects (Loewenstein and Prelec, 1993). In contrast, it is hard for constituents to tally the amount of expenditures across several messages (Stein and Bickers, 1994). The credit claiming process amplifies the value of actions for legislators—even if those expenditures had not reached the district yet—and dampens the importance of expenditure size to cultivate support.

Constituents lack of information about how federal expenditures occur and rapid evaluation of credit claiming statements creates the opportunity for legislators to receive credit for expenditures—even when representatives never *literally* claim credit for the expenditure. Our intuitive brains seek coherence in short statements and establishing a causal sequence is essential for making a statement coherent (Kahneman, 2011; Hassin, Bargh and Uleman, 2002). The result is that when reading our brains tend to infer causality—even when no causal statement is explicitly established. The linguist Paul Grice (1989) calls this inference an “implicature”—because we tend to reach conclusions in language that are only implied in a statement, even if never literally stated (Grice, 1989).

Consider a press release from Frank LoBiondo who “*announced* that the Forest Grove Volunteer Fire Company will receive \$108,063 in federal funding from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program” (LoBiondo (2012), emphasis added).

Note the verb leaves ambiguous LoBiondo’s role in securing the expenditure. If we read this sentence quickly, however, we may fail to notice the subtle verb usage. Instead, when reading quickly voters will form a spontaneous causal inference—attributing the funding to LoBiondo (Kahneman, 2011; Hassin, Bargh and Uleman, 2002).

The statement from LoBiondo makes an implication that causes the formation of a spontaneous causal inference. The result is a subtle deception—perpetrated merely with the verb “announce”—and with legislators credibly able to claim they never lied about their role in securing the expenditure. The ability to engage in this deception is of substantial value to the legislator, allowing them to receive credit for an expenditure the representative may have had only an indirect role in securing. This subtle deception broadens what legislators can claim credit for delivering to the district. Not only will legislators claim credit for spending that is earmarked in Appropriations bill. Legislators will also claim credit for expenditures and programs allocated through bureaucratic agencies, perhaps even through competitive processes. Indeed, the value of announcements implies that legislators are able to receive credit for expenditures any time they can merely imply they are responsible for an expenditure.

Constituents respond to legislators’ credit claiming efforts, seizing on information about the actions that legislators report, rather than the amount secured. The rhetoric around spending also determines when constituents’ budget preferences affect the credit they allocate legislators’ for particularistic spending. This is because constituents hold seemingly contradictory preferences. Constituents commonly prefer higher levels of spending in popular programs, while also expressing a preference for overall budget reduction (Hansen, 1998). For example, a Pew Research poll conducted

in January 2012 found that 69% of Americans have a preference for reducing the budget. And yet, another poll shortly after in February 2012 found that in almost every potential area of cuts, the public preferred increases in expenditures. So constituents may reward legislators for expenditures in the district, even if constituents—such as conservative constituents—have a strong preference to reduce the federal budgets.

Constituent budget preferences will affect credit, however, when they are made salient with budget criticism. When opponents—either challengers in an election or other critics—explain how expenditures affect the budget deficit or the federal debt, they remind constituents of a preference for budget reduction. The result is that legislators will be penalized for their association with “wasteful” spending in Washington.

When legislators engage in credit claiming they solve the representative’s problem—drawing constituents’ attention towards expenditures in the district. And constituents are responsive to the credit claiming messages—using the information legislators provide to infer legislators’ ability to influence expenditures in the district. But the process implies that legislators are able to receive credit for much more than expenditures as they occur in the district or grants as they created. This creates an opportunity for legislators to cultivate a personal vote using an even broader set of activities.

2.2.3 Spending, Lying, and the Media

It may be tempting to conclude from our argument that the actual spending matters little—after all, legislators are able to claim credit for projects they had little role in securing or expenditures that may have only a slim chance of reaching the district in

the far future. But actual spending is essential for legislators to create an impression of influence. Because members of Congress are often able to exert influence over how spending occurs, it is *plausible* that legislators are influencing spending to reach the district. As Mayhew (1974) observed, this plausibility is essential for legislators to claim credit for performing actions in the district.

A second reason that actual spending matters is that legislators have a strong aversion to explicitly lying about their accomplishments to constituents. This aversion is because legislators—and their staff—anticipate substantial negative consequences if caught in an outright lie (Arnold, 1992). Legislators know that if caught in a lie they risk undermining the benefit of credit claiming. Being caught in a lie provides ammunition to potential opponents and undermines valence characteristics at the heart of the personal vote. Lying, then, is contradictory to the instrumental goals of credit claiming.

Legislators are not the only ones who can influence constituents' impressions about who is responsible for spending. Political opponents may try to undermine legislators' credit claiming efforts. Part of the undermining effort may occur when constituents accuse legislators of being spend thrifts. But we might expect that opponents would try to clarify that legislators had only a limited role in securing some expenditures. The timing of Congressional elections makes this sort of attack unlikely. During most of a legislator's time in office they do not have an obvious opponent who could criticize a credit claiming statement. And even if there is an opponent who wants to criticize an expenditure, the careful language dampens the force of a potential attack. After all, when claiming credit for competitive grants, legislators only imply they deserve credit for the spending and never literally lie about their role in delivering the funds.

This makes a pithy, accurate, and effective attack difficult to mount.

The media may also provide another check on legislators' credit claiming efforts. We might expect that reporters would limit legislators' ability to claim credit for expenditures or would better clarify legislators' role in securing expenditures. But shrunken budgets have limited newspapers' capacity for original Washington reporting (Vinson, 2002). The result is that newspapers are increasingly reliant upon legislators for content about what is happening in Washington (Grimmer, 2013). Far from a check on legislators, then, newspapers are now a tool that helps legislators amplify their message and reach more constituents. And legislators' other credit claiming mediums operate outside of newspapers or other media—such as newsletters.

2.3 Conclusion

Legislators use credit claiming messages to ensure constituents allocate credit for expenditures that occur in the district. The credit claiming, credit allocation process solves a problem for representatives—ensuring they receive credit for actions popular with constituents. It also creates opportunities for representatives. It enables legislators to vary their association with spending and to claim credit for more than disbursements as they occur in the district. And it affects how constituents allocate credit for expenditures—causing constituents to focus on the actions that legislators report, rather than the total amount spent.

Throughout the book we present evidence for how this process occurs and show how this process matters for representation and policy—how it affects the relationship between legislators and constituent and the way the federal government disburses funds. We begin in the next chapter, where we use a new collection of House press

releases to characterize when and how legislators claim credit for spending.

Chapter 3

How Legislators Create an Impression of Influence

A long time Democratic member of Congress, Bart Stupak has strong incentives to cultivate an impression of influence over spending. This is partly because of his district's demographics. As industry has fled northern Michigan, Stupak's working class district has become increasingly reliant on federal investments to sustain the few jobs that remained. It is also because Stupak represents a swing district: in 2000 and 2004 it voted for George W. Bush, but in 2008 the district narrowly swung to Barack Obama. To win reelection regularly Stupak needs a personal vote—support not based on partisan affiliation or ideological positions—to win over both political independents and moderate Republicans.

Stupak creates an impression of influence, in part, by making regular appearances at federal projects in the district. For example, he was on Mackinac Island on May 31st, 2008 to participate in a groundbreaking ceremony for a new hospital. At the ceremony, Stupak praised the federal investment in the hospital asserting that it was

“a vast improvement on the old facility” (Polk, 2008). Stupak’s office also regularly issued press releases claiming credit for federal projects in the district. One press release “announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Rural Development fund has approved a loan of \$440,000 to Calumet Township for improvements to the Township’s wastewater system” (Stupak, 2007), in a different press release Stupak “announced [that] Northern Michigan University in Marquette has received \$673,462 for the university’s Electrical Power Technician job training program” (Stupak, 2010*c*), in another he “announced three grants totaling \$80,000 for the cities of Beaverton and Gladwin to purchase vehicles for public safety” (Stupak, 2010*b*), and in still another statement Stupak asserted that he “was able to secure \$3.4 million for a wide variety of vital projects for northern Michigan communities and facilities” in an Appropriations bill (Stupak, 2005). His office’s credit claiming efforts translated into local news coverage. One story broadcasted that Stupak announced “\$750,000 grant...award to Central Michigan University” (Jankoviak, 2009). Another story explained how “the city of Gladwin has received two grants totaling \$65,000 to assist local businesses” and included a quote from Stupak who explained that “we must do everything we can to help create and save jobs in our communities” (Staff, 2010*a*).

Stupak uses the press releases to cultivate an impression among constituents that he is influential in delivering money to the district. And the hope is that this impression of influence leads to electoral support. In this chapter, we demonstrate that Stupak’s strategic response to his district reflects a broader pattern in which legislators claims credit for spending and what projects they claim credit for obtaining. Legislators’ incentives to cultivate an impression of influence varies across districts and, therefore, so too does their credit claiming behavior. The incentive to

credit claim can arise from district demographics—such as median income or level of education—and from the partisan composition of the district.

We also demonstrate what legislators claim credit for securing. Legislators do claim credit for spending that actually occurs in the district and cut ribbons at new facilities. But legislators also claim credit for action taken throughout the appropriations process that are far removed from actual expenditures—including requesting that expenditures be included in spending bills. Legislators also claim credit broadly. Not only do they tout earmarks secured during the appropriations process, they also claim credit for grants allocated by executive agencies, where legislators have only indirect influence. And we show that legislators tend to announce relatively small grants. In some instances legislators announce expenditures that are as small as \$1,000. More typical expenditures are only slightly larger—with the usual expenditure announce providing only pennies per-capita in the district.

The evidence in this chapter shows why communication is essential for understanding how representation occurs around spending and why actual spending and projects in a district provide only an incomplete picture of how legislators use particularistic projects to cultivate a personal vote. It is incomplete, in part, because legislators differ in how closely they strive to be associated with spending (Stein and Bickers, 1994). Some legislators work hard to be closely associated with projects. Other legislators avoid an association with spending projects and instead focus on policy work. It is also insufficient because legislators claim credit for projects long before they reach the district and even when the chance of the spending actually occurring in the district is small—so the credit that legislators receive need not have a strong relationship to current levels of spending or number of new projects.

To demonstrate how legislators use the spending process to create an impression of influence we analyze a new and large collection of House press releases—every press release, from each House office, from 2005 to 2010—a collection of nearly 170,000 press releases. To analyze the abundance of text, we make use of statistical tools applied to text methods, which facilitate efficient analysis of extremely large text collections (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). Applying these tools, we measure how often legislators claim credit for spending and what legislators claim credit for delivering to the district. With the measures of legislators’ credit claiming behavior in hand, we provide comprehensive evidence of how legislators create an impression of influence.

Before examining legislators’ credit claiming evidence, we want to emphasize that this chapter is not intended to demonstrate the causal effect of various district characteristics on legislators’ rhetorical choices. Like many other studies of how legislators engage constituents (see our discussion in Chapter 4), we lack a strong identification strategy to examine how district characteristics alter legislators’ strategies (Caughey and Sekhon, 2012). This is all the more challenging because we analyze several facets of district demand—each of which are intimately intertwined, with some features causal consequences of others. Rather than provide credible estimates of the effect of district characteristics or institutional activities on credit claiming frequency, we instead document the systematic relationship between characteristics of districts and legislators’ strategies. The simple comparisons that we make in this chapter are insufficient to establish the causal effect of district characteristics on legislators’ strategies. But they are sufficient to establish an important descriptive fact: legislators who represent different types of districts adopt different types of strategies (Grimmer, 2013). And building on this descriptive fact in subsequent chapters, we use a series of ex-

periments to demonstrate the causal effect of legislators' credit claiming statements on constituent credit allocation and the personal vote.

3.1 Measuring Legislators' Credit Claiming Propensity

To measure how legislators cultivate an impression of influence we use an original collection of Congressional press releases. Press releases may seem an odd choice for analyzing Congressional communication, but there is growing evidence that press releases provide a reliable source for studying how members of Congress communicate with constituents. Using a collection of Senate press releases, Grimmer (2013) shows that press releases broadly reflect senators' priorities in Washington and that the content of press releases are likely to reach constituents. Press releases commonly affect the content of newspaper stories and are sometimes run verbatim in local papers.

Press releases are also a medium where legislators regularly claim credit for spending. Press releases can be issued on any day and on any topic—particularly useful for legislators who may want to announce a new grant or expenditure. Floor speeches are less useful for studying credit claiming—legislators rarely claim credit for money on the House or Senate floor (Grimmer, 2013). Newsletters are another potentially useful source for studying how members of Congress claim credit for spending (Lipinski, 2004). The prominence of franked mail makes it a potentially useful place for legislators to cultivate support with constituents, but only a few newsletters are sent each year, making them unable to reliably capture legislators' credit claiming efforts (Lipinski, 2004).

One of the virtues of press releases is that they are plentiful—likely to capture how members of Congress cultivate a relationship with constituents. But this virtue is also a problem, because the abundance of text makes analyzing the press release corpus costly. With so many press releases, manually reading and classifying the collection of press releases would require an immense effort. Simply reading and attaching a label to each press release would be an immense task. Even at the extremely fast rate of one press release read every two minutes, classifying all the documents three times would require over 16,800 hours of coder labor.

The usual alternatives are not ideal for studying how members of Congress cultivate support. Scholars of Congressional communication commonly analyze only a small sample of legislators (Schiller, 2000; Lipinski, 2004; Sulkin, 2005; Sellers, 2010), but the small samples often make it difficult to detect relationships that are present among all members of Congress. Further, the specific samples usually include only behavior from a particular year (Lipinski, 2004; Sulkin, 2005) or particular set of policy debates (Sellers, 2010). This provides valuable insights from the time periods studied, but are inappropriate for reaching more general conclusions.

Rather than rely on only a sub-sample of press releases, we analyze the entire collection of press releases using computational methods that ease the cost of analysis (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). We make use of supervised learning methods to efficiently classify the content of our press releases (Hillard, Purpura and Wilkerson, 2008; Hopkins and King, 2010). Supervised learning methods begin like traditional manual content analysis. The first step is to manually classify a sample of the press releases. But then the sample of press releases are used to train—or supervise—statistical algorithms that classify the remaining documents. The end product is a

set of labeled documents that, if the classification is performed accurately, allow us to analyze the entire collection of press releases as if they were hand labeled.

To classify the press releases we began with a four part coding scheme, developed from the classic typology of Congressional action advanced in Mayhew (1974) and then refined with our team of three coders. To refine our scheme we made two pilot attempts at coding documents—we used an existing coding scheme, assigned our coders to classify a set of documents and then met with the coders to diagnose ambiguity and to clarify disagreements. After two rounds, agreement improved substantially and we settled on our final coding scheme. All the press releases that we use to train our models are labeled *after* we settled on a coding scheme, ensuring we are not artificially inflating our agreement rates.

The first category in our coding scheme—the target category—is for *credit claiming* press releases. Building off of the definition of credit claiming advanced in Mayhew (1974), we define a credit claiming press release as one that explicitly announces an expenditure targeted to the district. This includes tax expenditures—tax breaks that are particularly targeted at the district. Because we are interested in *particularistic* expenditures, we exclude expenditures that are national in scope—such as a legislator discussing spending on a war. The focus on district categories ensures that our study of legislators’ credit claiming aligns with the type of district level spending that comprises a large literature on how legislators use spending to cultivate support (Ferejohn, 1974; Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen, 1981; Levitt and Snyder, 1997; Strömberg, 2004; Chen and Malhotra, 2007; Berry, Burden and Howell, 2010*b*; Kriner and Reeves, 2012).

The second category describes *egregious earmark* press releases. These press re-

leases discuss earmarks and particularistic spending, but criticize such legislation rather than claiming credit for it. Disaggregating this category in our coding protocol helps ensure that our classifier distinguishes these linguistically similar press releases. The vast majority of the egregious earmark press releases come from Jeff Flake (R-AZ), a conservative legislator known for his opposition to government spending projects. In a similar style to William Proxmire’s Golden Fleece awards, Flake used creative messages to highlight spending he viewed as inappropriate. One press release criticized spending to address abandoned mines. In it, Flake stated that “With this earmark, taxpayers are quite literally getting the shaft” (Flake, 2008).

The remaining categories describe other types of messages that legislators may convey that often have little connection to expenditures. Our third category are *advertising* press releases or press releases that honor the achievements of local constituents (see Chapter 4). Press releases in this category commonly include announcing winners of Congressional art contests or announcing nominations for the service academies. The fourth category are *position taking* press releases. This includes press releases where a legislator touts a position on a prominent policy debate, claims credit for passing legislation that does not fall into the previous categories, or explicitly attacks the other party.

With this coding scheme, we asked our team of three coders to classify 800 sampled press releases—a number that we chose to balance the accuracy of our statistical models against the cost of hand coding documents (Hopkins and King, 2010; Jurafsky and Martin, 2008). Our coders displayed extremely high accuracy. Across all documents, at least one pair of coders agreed on 98% of documents and all three coders agreed 68% of the time. Agreement is even higher if we focus on just the

credit claiming press releases—with all three coders agreeing 87% on whether a press release is claiming credit for an expenditure or not. Across categories we have an extremely high level of agreement, with a Krippendorff’s Alpha of 0.66.

A further indication of our coder’s reliability is that words that we expect to be associated with credit claiming messages are much more likely to occur in press releases our coders labeled as credit claiming. We use the *mutual information* between a word and the credit claiming category to identify words that a document is claiming credit for spending (Manning et al., 2008). Heuristically, mutual information measures how well a single word separates credit claiming press releases from other press releases—higher mutual information indicates that a word better separates categories than a word with lower mutual information. The words that have the highest mutual information with the credit claiming category are words like **funding, million, announces, grant, funds, department, project, secured**. As we will see below, each of the words are regularly used when legislators cultivate an impression of influence over spending that occurs in the district. Our primary focus is on understanding credit claiming behavior, so we use the hand labels to identify whether each press releases is credit claiming or not. To train the statistical models, we first need to reconcile the three labels from our hand coders. Given the extremely high agreement, we used a voting procedure to determine each document’s label—the modal code for each document is the final label.

With an accurate sample of hand labeled documents, we are ready to train statistical models to classify all the remaining press releases. To classify all of the nearly 170,000 press releases from this relative small sample of hand coded documents we use an ensemble classifier, which combines a collection of prediction methods to predict

whether each document is claiming credit. Ensemble methods are increasingly used in machine learning tasks (Dietterich, 2000; Hillard, Purpura and Wilkerson, 2008). This is because ensemble classifiers usually improve accuracy, while also making predictions more stable and facilitate learning about more complicated functional forms than any one of the constituent methods of the ensemble. We include five methods in our ensemble: a support vector machine (SVM), LASSO, elastic-net, random forests, and KRLS. Our ensemble of classifiers weights methods according to their predictive accuracy, which we assess using a cross validation procedure (van der Laan, Polley and Hubbard, 2007). The ensemble method attached weight to three of the constituent methods: 61% of the weight was given to random forest, 23% to elastic net, and 16% to SVM. (For full details on processing the texts, training the ensemble, and measuring its accuracy see the Appendix.)

This ensemble method is accurate—able to achieve very reliable individually coded documents (Hillard, Purpura and Wilkerson, 2008; Hopkins and King, 2010). We assess the performance of our ensemble method by replicating our classification task using *cross validation* (Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman, 2001). We create our entire ensemble for a subset of hand coded documents and then use the ensemble to classify the held out hand coded documents. This allows us to test the performance of our model against the “gold standard” of hand labeled documents. This demonstrates that the ensemble method was able to accurately replicate hand coding: 90% of our out of sample classifications agreed with the hand coders. Given that a document is credit claiming, we identified it at a high rate (67%) and given that we made a prediction that a document was credit claiming, it was very likely to actually be credit claiming (85%).¹

¹These two measures are often known as *recall* and *precision*, respectively. To make the binary

Given this high accuracy rate, we trained our ensemble of classifiers on the full sample of hand coded press releases and applied it to our collection of 169,779 press releases. The product is that each press release is labeled as credit claiming or not. This reveals a relatively high rate of overall credit claiming—20.3% of all the press releases—over 34,000 press releases—are labeled as credit claiming press releases. This is in line with prior estimates of credit claiming in work on Senate press releases over a similar time period (Grimmer, 2013).

The labeled documents are useful on their own, but our primary interest is in assessing legislators' credit claiming rate. We characterize the legislators' credit claiming rate with the proportion of press releases each legislator, in each year, allocated to credit claiming (Grimmer, 2010). The simplest estimate of this proportion would just count the total number of a legislator's press releases that are credit claiming in a year and then divide by the total number of press releases from that year. But some House members issue only a few press releases in a year, causing the estimated proportion to be highly variable (Gelman and Hill, 2007). We introduce a small amount of smoothing—determined in a multilevel model—to obtain a less variable estimate of legislators' propensity to credit claiming (and to decrease the mean square error of our estimate of the credit claiming rate) (Gelman and Hill, 2007).² The smoothed estimates still provide accurate assessments of the proportion of press releases legislators dedicate to credit claiming. But (heuristically), it also ensures that we would

classification we had to determine a cut off in the probability of being a credit claiming document. We did this to maximize an out of sample measure of our performance—setting the threshold at 0.46. We have performed a wide array of robustness checks on the classification algorithm and our measures. Indeed, we replicate all the findings in this chapter using the probability that a press is a credit claiming instead of our binary classification.

²The smoothing was quite mild—with the primary effect ensuring that legislators who issued only a few press releases not being assessed as sending out all their press releases as credit claiming or all as not credit claiming. Again, rerunning our analyses without smoothing yields the same results, though the estimates are more variable.

provide accurate predictions of future performance, not extreme predictions based on too few documents analyzed.

After smoothing, we now have a measure of the proportion of press releases from each representative, in each year, that claim credit for expenditures in the district.

3.2 Strategic Credit Claiming Rates

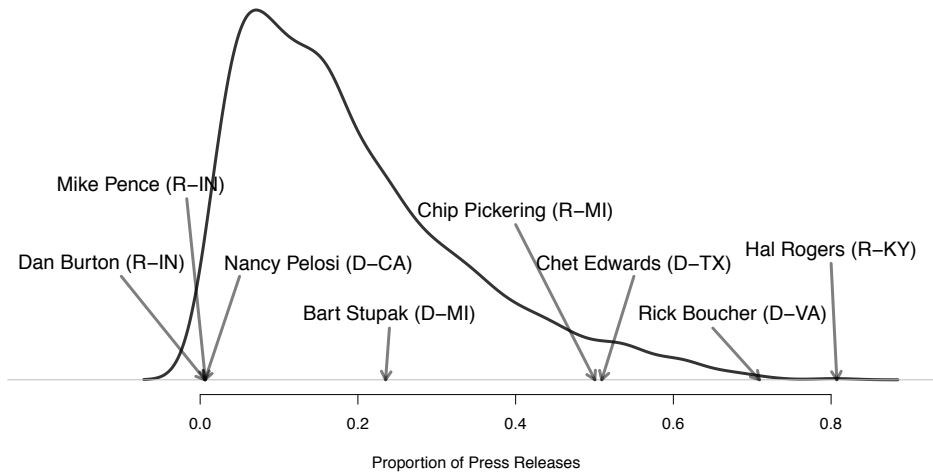
Using our measures of credit claiming, we characterize how often legislators claim credit for expenditures. Figure 3.1 summarizes the distribution of credit claiming propensities in the House of Representatives from 2005 to 2010. The density plot shows the substantial variation in how often legislators use credit claiming in their press releases and provides further face validity to our measures of credit claiming propensity. At one end of the extreme is Dan Burton (R-IN), who allocated only 0.5% of his press releases to credit claiming in 2008. Burton had strong electoral incentives to avoid credit claiming. He is a prominent conservative Republican who represents a heavily Republican district in central Indiana. In 2008, Burton faced a difficult challenge from John McGroff. McGroff alleged that Burton “voted for every spending bill that went through the office” and that Burton’s actions “are not the actions of a fiscally conservative congressman who cares about personal responsibility” (Staff, 2008*b*). Mike Pence (R-IN) and Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) also allocated a similarly small share of their press releases to credit claiming, reflecting their pursuit of higher office and Washington activities. Pence (R-IN), who was Chairman of the Republican Conference, worked to cultivate a reputation as a staunch fiscal conservative who supported earmark reform and successfully ran for governor of Indiana in 2012. Pelosi (D-CA) was Minority Leader in 2005 and 2006 and Speaker from 2007 to 2010, leading

her to focus her attention on policy, with less space allocated to claiming credit for money spent in her district.

Moving along the distribution, we find legislators who allocate a larger share of their press releases to credit claiming to cultivate a personal vote. Bart Stupak, for example, allocates about a quarter of his press releases to credit claiming. More marginal Democrats—such as Chet Edwards (D-TX) and Rick Boucher (D-VA)—allocate an even larger share of their press releases to credit claiming statements. More marginal Republicans—such as Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ)—also allocate a larger share of their press releases to credit claiming to cultivate support with independents and even some Democrats.

And at the opposite extreme from Dan Burton is Hal Rogers (R-KY), who used 80.7% of his press releases in 2008 to claim credit for spending. Rogers, who has served on the Appropriations committee for nearly 30 years, was described in a Washington Times profile as using “his seat on the Appropriations Committee to protect one of his district’s most important economic engines” (Staff, 2012). Rogers represents one of the poorest districts in the country—a rural district in Eastern Kentucky with few industries, many of whom are reliant on federal contracts to stay open. And Rogers is not particularly ideological. He once remarked to his colleagues that “we can’t afford a luxury like ideology”. Perhaps it is not surprising that a Lexington Herald-Leader profile of Rogers proclaims that he is the “prince of pork” (Cheves, 2005). Between Dan Burton and Hal Rogers, representatives adopt distinctive strategies for associating themselves with spending in the district. We now examine how characteristics of the district—and legislators’ experience in Washington—covary with where legislators fall on this distribution.

Figure 3.1: Substantial Variation in Credit Claiming Propensity



This figure shows the substantial variability in credit claiming propensity across House members, as measured in the proportion of press releases that claim credit for spending.

The variation in legislators' credit claiming propensity is strategic, and determined in part by a consideration of how legislators can cultivate support among constituents (Mayhew, 1974; Stein and Bickers, 1997). The decision calculus is straightforward: legislators tend to use credit claiming more often when it is valuable to them electorally and when alternative strategies are likely to be less effective. District demand for spending partially determines the value of claiming credit: when there is a greater need for spending there is likely a greater return on credit claiming efforts. Median district income will partially affect this perceived demand. Residents of low-income districts, like Stupak's Michigan district or Hal Rogers' Kentucky district, are more reliant on federal spending to build new infrastructure, to continue providing public services, and to create jobs.

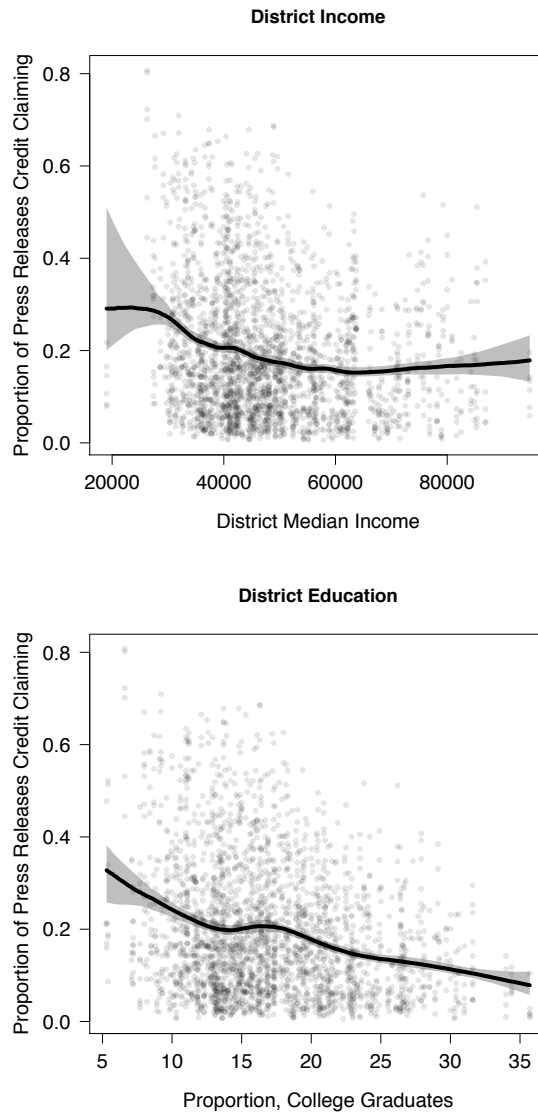
The top plot in Figure 3.2 shows that legislators from low-income districts tend

to claim credit more often than their colleagues who represent wealthier districts. In Figure 3.2 we plot the proportion of legislators' press releases allocated to credit claiming against median district income. We summarize the relationship with a simple non-parametric regression (Cleveland, 1979), with cross validation determining the amount of smoothing. The thick line in the top plot of Figure 3.2 summarizes the relationship between proportion of press releases allocated to credit claiming and median district income, while the gray band is a 95-percent confidence envelope.

This plot shows that representatives of the poorest districts consistently make the case that they exercise influence over the Appropriations process and deliver money to the district. And the expected proportion of press releases allocated to credit claiming decreases as the median district income increases, with the relationship relatively flat for higher levels of income. The non-parametric regression clearly shows that representatives of the poorest district claim credit at a higher rate than other legislators. A simple parametric comparison provides a clear sense of the magnitude of this difference. Legislators who represent districts in the lowest quartile of income—districts with median incomes below \$39,000—claim credit for spending in 4.6 percentage points more of their press releases than other representatives (95 percent confidence interval, [0.02, 0.07]) and 6.5 percentage points more than the representatives in the richest districts (95 percent confidence intervals, [0.04, 0.09]).

The bottom plot in Figure 3.2 shows a similar relationship with district education. Higher levels of education are obviously correlated with income and may also indicate that residents have different, more ideological, priorities. The horizontal-axis has our measure of district education—the proportion of district constituents over 25 who hold a Bachelor's degree—and we place legislators' credit claiming rate on the vertical axis.

Figure 3.2: Proportion of Credit Claiming Press Releases are Responsive to District Characteristics



This figure shows that the representatives in the poorest districts tend to claim credit for federal projects at a higher rate than representatives of richer districts and that representatives of districts with lower percentage of college graduates tend to engage in credit claiming at a higher rate than representatives of districts with a higher percentage.

Legislators' who represent well educated districts allocate substantially less space to claiming credit for money. A seven percentage point increase in the proportion of

residents with a Bachelor's degree is associated with a 4.5 percentage point decrease in credit claiming (95 percent confidence interval [-0.05,-0.04]).

The types of industries in a district and residents' occupations will also affect legislators' perceptions of how spending is rewarded in the district (Adler and Lapinski, 1997). The density of unions in a district is one of the strongest indicators that a district is filled with the types of constituents who will reward federal spending (Adler and Lapinski, 1997). Union members recognize that government spending can lead to new construction, or provide much needed resources for education or the public sector. Representatives in districts where there are more unions do tend to claim credit for spending at a higher rate than other representatives, though the differences are more subtle than income differences. We can summarize this relationship with a simple linear regression of the proportion of press releases that are credit claiming against the percent of district residents who are members of a labor union (Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2013*a*). Legislators who represent a district at the 75th percentile of unionization allocate about 2.5 percentage points more to credit claiming than a legislator who represents a district at the 25th percentile of unionization (95 percent confidence interval, [0.01, 0.04]).

Chip Pickering (R-MS), located to the right of Figure 3.1, exemplifies a legislator who represents a lower income district and has a high rate of credit claiming. He represented Mississippi's third Congressional district, a working class district with a median income of only \$34,750, in a state that has a weak tax base and few social services. This makes Pickering's district particularly reliant on federal expenditures to provide basic services. And Pickering makes clear his role in delivering money to the district. From 2005 to 2008, the four years Pickering is in our sample, he claimed

credit for spending in 50% of his press releases. Pickering announced a variety of expenditures in his district supporting basic public services, including education, fire, and police. For example, Pickering announced a “\$2,468,070 Department of Justice Grant for Mississippi State University for computer crime training and law enforcement assistance” (Pickering, 2006*a*). He also announced “five grants from the U.S. Department of Justice for Mississippi law enforcement” (Pickering, 2006*b*) and “Homeland Security Operations and Safety Grant of \$75,391 for the Forest Fire Department” (Pickering, 2007*a*). He also claimed credit for money to fund local infrastructure. This included funding secured in a supplemental appropriation for highway spending, including “\$25 million in funding for projects in Mississippi’s Third District”, which included \$10 million to “widen MS Hwy 19 between Philadelphia and Collinsville” (Pickering, 2007*b*).

A contrast to Chip Pickering is Tom Price, a prominent conservative Republican from Georgia. Price represents one of the most affluent, educated, and Republican districts in the country. The median income in his district is over \$78,000 and has the highest percentage of constituents with a college degree. And Republican presidential candidates enjoy substantial support in his district, reflecting the district’s deeply Republican and conservative constituency. In 2004, for example, John Kerry received only 29.5% of the vote. Barack Obama fared better in 2008, but still received only 35% of the vote. Because Price can win reelection by focusing on wealthy, well educated copartisans, he has little reason to base his appeals to constituents on his ability to deliver money to the district. And Price rarely claims credit for spending—allocating only about 3% of his press releases to credit claiming from 2005 to 2010. Rather than make the case he deserves credit for spending, Price presents himself as an ideological

and partisan legislator. He attacks Obama administration policies and articulates conservative positions in salient policy disputes. Both types of messages are more likely to appeal to the affluent and educated Republicans in his district.

Slowly changing district demographics—such as income and union concentration—are one type of district characteristic that covaries with legislators’ credit claiming priorities. But legislators also consider the political consequences of their credit claiming statements—deciding how to balance appeals to copartisans—by attacking the other party or touting policy work in the institutions—and the cultivation of a personal vote with opposing partisans and independents. The tension between the personal and partisan vote became particularly strong for Republicans after Barack Obama was elected president. As we show in Chapter 7, Republicans became increasingly critical of stimulus spending after Obama’s election. The objection to spending was reinforced by Tea Party activists, who articulated boisterous objections to particularistic spending in the districts (Skocpol and Williamson, 2011).

The combination of opposition to Obama’s expenditure policies and pressure from the partisan base made claiming credit for expenditures less valuable for Republicans. The result is a substantial decrease in the Republican credit claiming rate. Figure 3.3 shows the proportion of press releases from each party that claimed credit for spending from 2005 to 2010. In 2005, Republicans and Democrats allocated nearly the same share of their press releases to claiming credit—Republicans claimed credit for spending in 0.5 percentage points *more* of their press releases than Democrats, but the difference is indistinguishable from zero (95 percent confidence interval, [-2.2, 3.1]). This nearly identical credit claiming behavior persisted in 2007—the year that the Republicans lost their majority in the House. Beginning in 2008, however, a

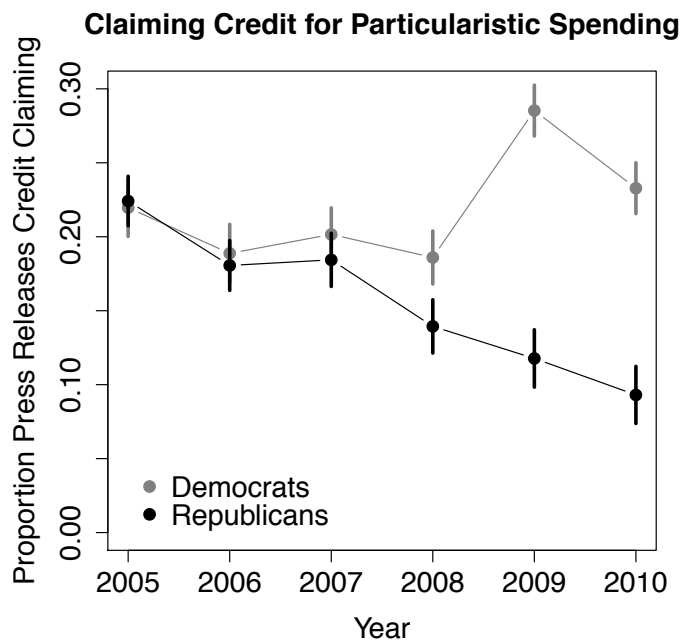
small difference emerged between the parties. That year, Democrats claimed credit for spending in 18.6 percent of their press releases, while Republicans claimed credit in only 13.9% of their press releases—a 4.5 percentage point difference (95 percent confidence interval, [2.2, 7.1]).

This initial decline corresponds with a surge in conservative attention to the earmarking process. This occurred, in part, because in the 2008 presidential race John McCain took his anti-pork barrel rhetoric to a broader audience. John McCain regularly attacked Barack Obama as a big spender—using Obama’s earmarks while in the Senate as evidence. In the first presidential debate between the general election candidates, McCain argued that Obama was not credible on spending reform because “he has asked for \$932 million of earmark pork-barrel spending, nearly a million dollars for every day that he’s been in the United States Senate.” At the third debate, McCain became more specific, criticizing Obama for “including \$3 million for an overhead projector in a planetarium in his hometown.” This raised the salience of growing Republican discontent with the earmarking process and prominently labeled as wasteful some of the projects legislators use to cultivate a personal vote.

After the 2008 election, as anger about stimulus spending rose, the Republican credit claiming rate dropped further. In 2009, Republicans claimed credit for spending in only 11.7% of their press releases—a decline from the 2008 Republican credit claiming rate of 13.9%, and substantially less than Democrats claimed credit at the same time. Democrats claimed credit for spending in over 28.5% of their press releases—with the stimulus bolstering their credit claiming opportunities. The decline in Republican credit claiming is even more pronounced in 2010—when the Tea Party movement had emerged as a force in American politics (see Chapter 7). That year

Republicans claimed credit for spending in only 9.3% of their press releases. In just five years, then, Republicans reduced their credit claiming propensity 13.1 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval, [-15.7, -10.6]), with many Republicans nearly abandoning credit claiming for spending all together. The result is that Republicans were much less likely to cultivate support using credit claiming messages.

Figure 3.3: The Decline of Republican Credit Claiming



This figure shows the decline in Republican credit claiming after Obama’s election. The figure presents the proportion of credit claiming from Republicans (black) and Democrats (grey) over the 6 years of press releases included in this study. The points are the average for each year and the thick lines are 95 percent confidence intervals. While the two parties claimed credit at about the same rate in 2005, by 2010 Democrats claimed credit for spending at over two-and-a-half times Republicans claimed credit for spending.

The Republican decline in credit claiming propensity occurred both because of who lost in the 2008 Congressional elections and how the remaining Republicans altered

their credit claiming rates. Republicans who were credit claiming focused were routed in the 2008 election—in part because they represent marginal districts that were most likely to swing towards Obama. Republicans who left Congress—either because they lost reelection, retired, or sought a higher office—claimed credit for spending in 18.2% of their press releases in 2008, while the Republicans who returned to Washington claimed credit for spending in 12.8% of their press releases. This 5.4 percentage point difference is large and explains in part why the Republican caucus that arrived after Obama was reelected was so opposed to spending: they relied upon it less to cultivate support with constituents (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.09, -0.01]).³

The elimination of the Republican credit claimers dramatically reshaped how the Republican caucus presented their work to constituents, eliminating those Republicans who relied most on credit claiming to cultivate electoral support. Selection, however, is only part of the reason that there is such a dramatic drop in credit claiming among Republicans. The remaining Republicans altered their credit claiming behavior in response to pressure from party activists—with the largest changes occurring among those Republicans who were likely to feel the strongest pressure from conservative activists. Republicans from the most conservative districts—those where McCain performed best—had the largest declines in their credit claiming frequency. To demonstrate this responsiveness to activists, we regressed the proportion of credit claiming press releases for the remaining Republicans in 2009 against the proportion

³This systematic elimination of credit claimers occurs only once in our data set—among Republicans after the 2008 election. There was no difference between Republicans who returned and left Washington after the 2006 election, when Republicans lost their majority. The Republicans who returned to Washington after the 2006 claimed credit for spending in 0.3 percentage points more of their press releases, a difference we cannot distinguish from zero (95 percent confidence interval [-0.04, 0.05]). There was also no systematic differences in credit claiming behavior between the Democrats who returned to Washington and those who left after the 2008 election. Those who won claimed credit in 0.4 percentage points fewer of their press releases, a difference indistinguishable from zero (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.07, 0.06]).

of their press releases that were credit claiming in 2008, and the proportion of district voters who supported McCain. This shows that a 10 percentage point increase in support for McCain in a district is associated with a 1.6 percentage point decrease in credit claiming focus (95 percent confidence interval, [-3.2, -0.00]). The relationship is robust. If we measure the change in credit claiming as a difference or include a variety of potentially confounding variables we still find that Republicans from districts where McCain performed well—districts that served as the base for Tea Party movement—had sharper declines in their credit claiming propensity.⁴

While Republicans were systematically avoiding credit claiming, Democrats embraced it. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided ample credit claiming opportunities for Democrats, resulting in a substantial boost in Democrats' propensity to claim credit for spending. In 2009 Democrats increased their credit claiming rate 9.9 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval [0.07, 0.13])—a nearly 53% increase in their credit claiming rate. This increase was nearly universal among Democrats, with new representatives claiming credit at nearly the same rate as the returning incumbents. Though the increase was largest among the misaligned representatives—those with the greatest incentive to bolster their credit claiming rates to cultivate constituent support.

The Republican party's response to the anti-spending mobilization of their base and the Democrats' response to the increased stimulus spending show the power of short-term political forces to shape the propensity to claim credit for spending. And

⁴The decrease in credit claiming propensity among Republicans in Republican districts is particular to 2009 and 2010. After the 2006 election—when Republicans lost their majority in the House—there was no systematic relationship between district vote share and change in credit claiming behavior. A 10 percentage point shift in a pro-Republican direction after that election is associated with only a 0.5 percentage point increase in credit claiming frequency, an increase that is indistinguishable from zero (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.02, 0.03]).

yet, the characteristics of a district still create incentives that are associated with differential rates of credit claiming in the district. Legislators who are misaligned with their districts still have incentive to engage in credit claiming more often than legislators who are well aligned with their constituency. Though the relationship will depend upon the relative return on credit claiming and the costs to touting particularistic spending.

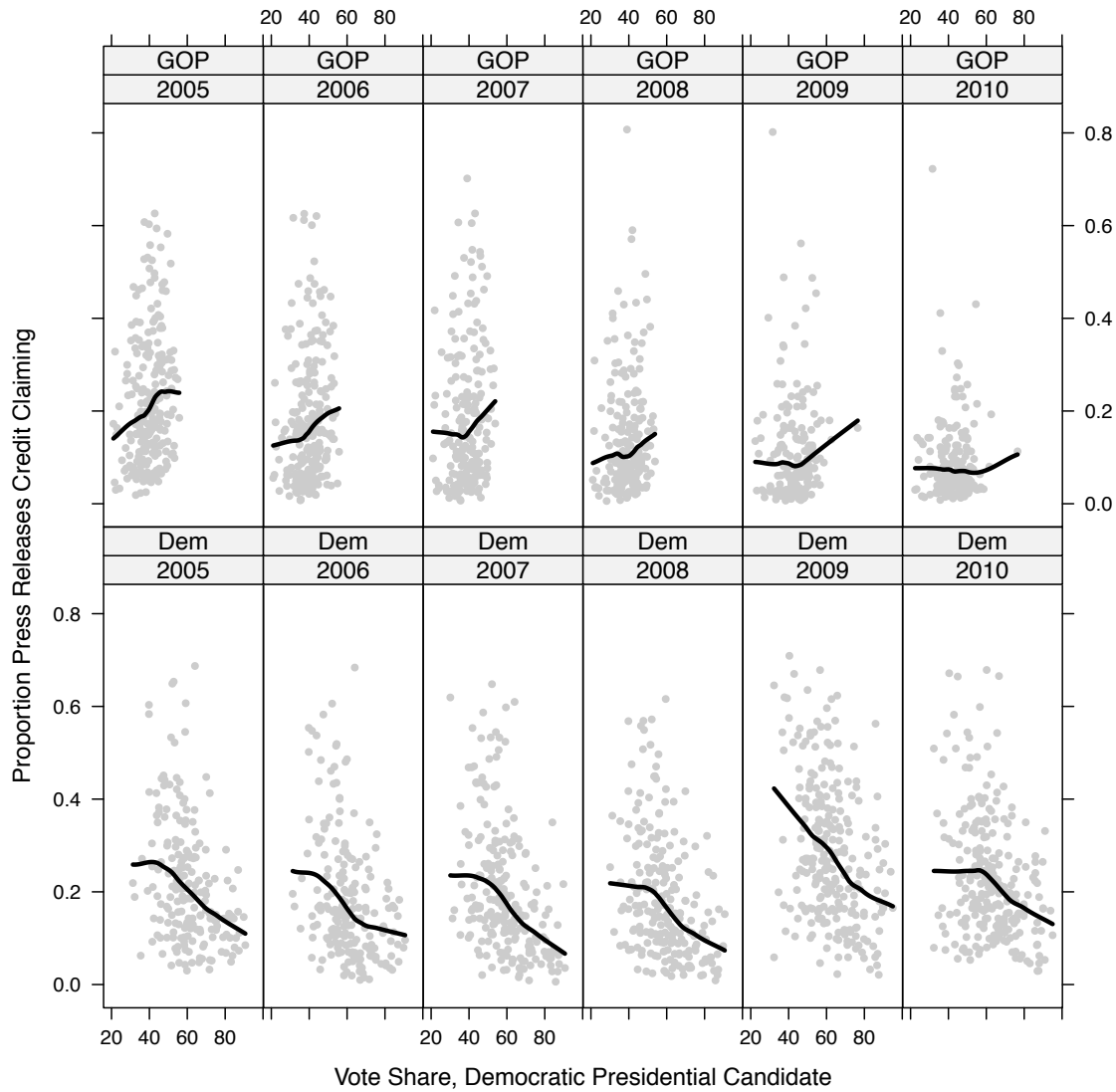
Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin (D-SD)—who we profiled in Chapter 1—is an example of a marginal representative who attempts to generate support from independents and opposing partisans with credit claiming statements. Herseth-Sandlin represented South Dakota in the House from 2004-2010—a state that the Republican presidential candidate carries regularly. To cultivate support with constituents, Herseth-Sandlin regularly claimed credit for spending in the state in addition to touting her blue-dog Democrat stances, such as voting against the Affordable Care Act. Her highest rate of credit claiming occurring in 2009, when she claimed credit for spending in 42.5% of her press releases. This contrasts sharply with Cynthia Lummis (R-WY). Lummis is an aligned representative: a Republican representing Wyoming: a deep red, conservative state. When appealing to this base, Lummis almost never claims credit for spending that occurs in Wyoming—allocating only about 2.8% of her press releases to credit claiming.

Figure 3.4 shows that Herseth-Sandlin and Lummis exemplify a broader pattern in how legislators' credit claiming strategies relate to the partisan composition of their district. Marginal Democrats and Republicans claim credit for spending more often than their well-aligned colleagues. Consider the bottom row of Figure 3.4, which shows how Democratic representatives' credit claiming propensity varies across

different districts. Each panel plots representatives' credit claiming propensity against the two-party vote share for the Democratic presidential candidate from 2005 (left-hand plot) to 2010 (right-hand plot). In each year, the more marginal Democrats are more likely to claim credit for spending than their more aligned colleagues. Overall, a shift from a district that supported the Democratic presidential candidate with 69% of the vote (the 75th percentile of districts with a Democratic representative) to a district that supported the Democratic presidential candidate with 52% of the vote (25th percentile of districts with a Democratic representative) is associated with a 5.1 percentage point increase in credit claiming propensity (95 percent confidence interval [0.03, 0.07]). This relationship is strongest in 2009—when the stimulus spending provided ample opportunity for marginal Democrats to claim credit for spending. That year the same shift in support is associated with a 6.1 percentage point increase in credit claiming (95 percent confidence interval [0.03, 0.09]).

The top-row of Figure 3.4 shows how the strategy of marginal Republicans responded to the decreased value of credit claiming—evidence of how representatives trade off pressure from the base and the need to cultivate a personal vote with constituents. From 2005 to 2007 there is a strong relationship between the composition of a district and Republicans' credit claiming propensities. In those years a shift from a district who supported with the Democratic presidential candidate with 35% of the vote (75th percentile of Republican districts) to a district who supported the Democratic presidential candidate with 44% of the vote (25th percentile of Republican districts) is associated with a 2.9 percentage point increase in the credit claiming rate (95 percent confidence interval, [0.01, 0.05]). But as Congressional Republicans made increasingly strong objections to particularistic spending, the relationship be-

Figure 3.4: Proportion of Credit Claiming Press Releases are Correlated with Partisan Composition



This figure shows the relationship between the partisan composition of a district and representatives' propensity to credit claim. Representatives with the strongest incentive to cultivate a personal vote—Republicans in Democratic districts and Democrats in Republican districts—have the highest rate of credit claiming. Legislators who are well-aligned with their district—Democrats in Democratic districts and Republicans from Republican districts—claim credit much less often.

tween district partisanship and credit claiming rate weakened. In 2010 the same shift in alignment is associated with a decrease in credit claiming propensity of 0.2 percentage points, a much smaller change in behavior (95 percent confidence interval, [-1.7, 1.2]).

Legislators' credit claiming rates reflect both district characteristics and short-term political forces. The force of these short-term forces, though, will be on the margin, causing legislators to deviate from their previous strategies. Because the short-term forces affect styles on the margin and because district characteristics tend to change gradually, legislators who remain in Congress adopt a relatively stable credit claiming rate. Indeed, legislators' credit claiming rate in a previous year is an excellent predictor of the credit claiming rate in the subsequent year. Legislators may alter their styles, but they are still responsive to slowly changing district characteristics. This stability is reflected in the correlation between the two years' credit claiming propensity—a strong 0.71. Even when there are shifts in the credit claiming propensity, there is still a strong relationship between legislators' credit claiming propensity from year-to-year. For example, in 2009 Democrats surged in their credit claiming rate and yet, the correlation between Democrats' credit claiming propensity in 2008 and 2009 remains a high 0.72

Legislators adopt relatively stable styles that reflect the characteristics of their constituency—both demographic and partisan considerations. Legislators' credit claiming propensities also reflect their work in Washington. One reason for this reflection is that constituents also affect work in Washington, inducing a correlation. Consider Figure 3.5, which shows the relationship between the proportion of credit claiming press releases against legislators' DW-Nominate scores. DW-Nominate

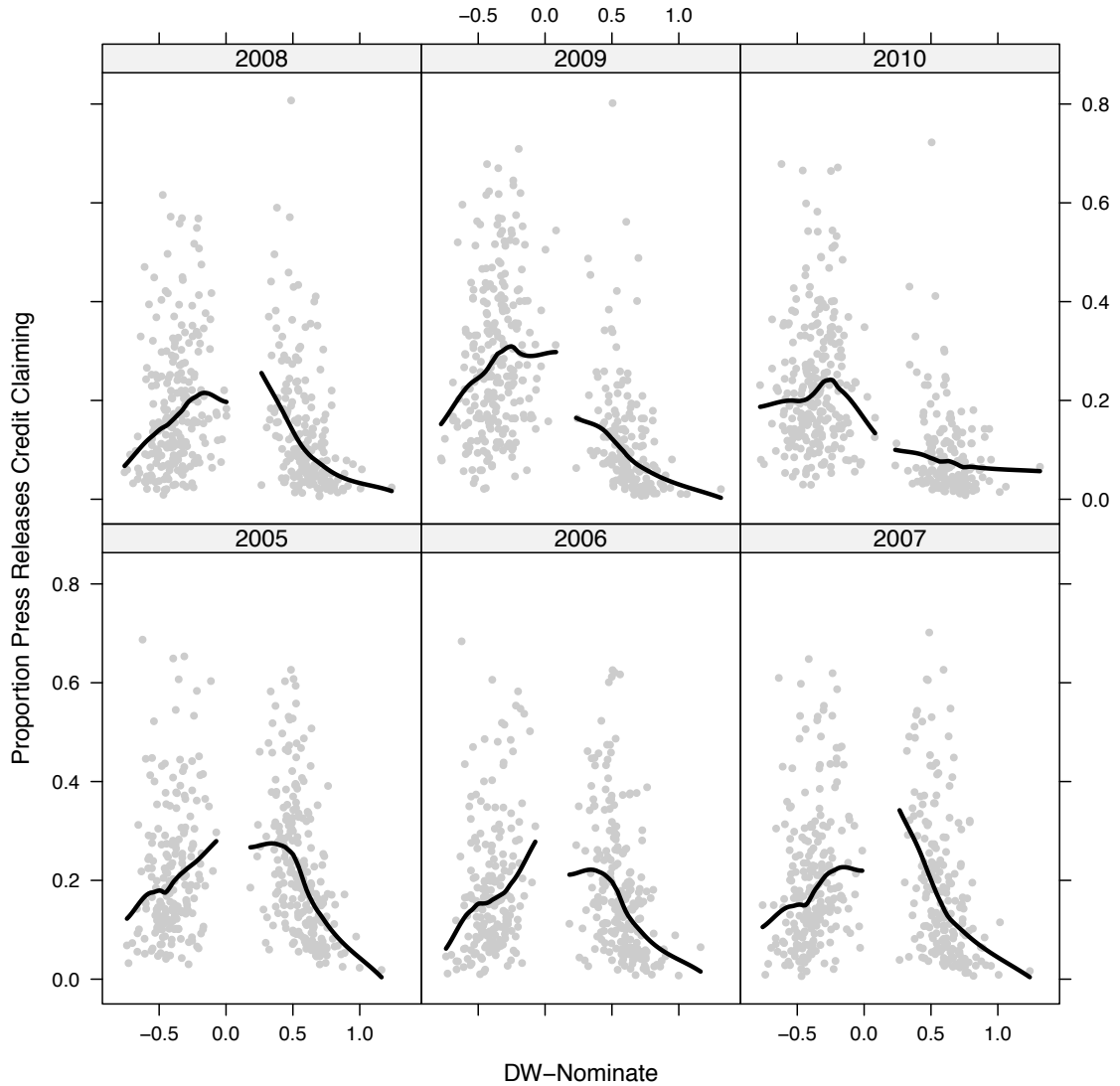
scores are a well validated measure of legislator ideology, based on voting coalitions that occur in Congress (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997). The lines in each cell summarize the relationship between credit claiming rate and ideology for Democrats (left-hand line) and Republicans (right-hand line).

Figure 3.5 shows that moderate legislators, for most of the years presented here, are much more likely to claim credit for spending. Consider, for example, 2006—the bottom, center cell in Figure 3.5. That year moderate Democrats claimed credit for spending in 23% of their press releases, while liberal Democrats only claimed for spending in 16% of their press releases—a substantial and significant difference in credit claiming strategy (7.1 percentage point difference, 95 percent confidence interval, [2.4, 11.7]). The relationship between ideology and credit claiming was even stronger for Republicans in 2005 and 2006. Moderate Republicans in 2005 allocated 16.6 percentage points more of their press releases to credit claiming than the most conservative Republicans (95 percent confidence interval [0.12, 0.20]).

Figure 3.5 also shows how the decline in value of credit claiming dampened the incentive for moderate Republicans to engage in credit claiming. In 2010—the top-right cell in Figure 3.5—there is a much weaker relationship between credit claiming propensity and ideology for Republicans. Moderate Republicans had a 7.6 percentage point higher rate of claiming credit than moderate Republicans (95 percent confidence interval [0.03, 0.12]). While the relationship between ideology and credit claiming remains significant, it is a much weaker relationship in 2010 than in 2005—an 8.9 percentage point decrease—a decline that is both substantively and statistically significant (8.9 percentage point decrease, 95 percent confidence interval, [0.01, 0.17]).

The relationship between ideology and credit claiming is partially due to respon-

Figure 3.5: Proportion of Credit Claiming Press Releases are Correlated with Legislator Ideology



This figure shows that ideological moderates are the most likely to engage in credit claiming.

siveness to district preference. But the relationship also reflect legislators' personal policy preferences. For example, libertarian crusader Ron Paul (R-TX) has one of the lowest credit claiming rates —estimated to claim credit for spending in only about

3% of his press releases from 2005-2010. Paul's aversion to credit claiming is one component of his much broader set of objections to government spending. During Paul's time in Congress he built a national base of support with a libertarian message that called for massive cuts from the federal government. Both for his own personal beliefs—and to remain a consistent spokesman for his agenda—Paul had to avoid claiming credit for spending. Pete Stark (D-CA) a California liberal had a similar aversion to credit claiming. Stark has bolstered his national profile by opposing expenditures he views as unnecessarily helping businesses—including farm subsidies and government bailouts of financial institutions.

Another reason that moderates may credit claim more often is that they may be in the best position to extract earmarks for their votes in Congress. As Evans (2004) explains, earmarks have been an important tool party leaders use to push legislation through Congress. To use earmarks party leaders set up an effective market, where legislators can trade their votes for the opportunity to earmark funds in an appropriations bill. Moderates are likely to have an advantage in this market, because they are cheaper to purchase than more ideologically extreme members of their coalition. This certainly could explain some of the differences in legislators' credit claiming. But as we show in the next section, legislators claim credit for a wide array of expenditures and legislators who want to claim credit for spending certainly have opportunity, not just earmarked funds in the district.

Legislators' roll call voting history—one facet of their work in Washington—is systematically related to their credit claiming propensity. Away from the floor, we should expect other facets of what representatives do in Washington to be systematically related to their propensity for credit claiming. Consider members of the

Appropriations committee. Representatives on Appropriations tend to use the committee to direct funds to the district and bolster support among constituents (Fenno, 1973; Deering and Smith, 1997). If representatives are using their position on Appropriations to bolster their impression of influence, then we should expect members of the committee to claim credit for spending at a higher rate than other representatives.

Press releases provide evidence for this expectation: members of Appropriations claim credit for spending at a higher rate than other representatives. Members of the Appropriations committee allocate 8.3 percentage points more of their press releases to credit claiming than other representatives (95 percent confidence interval [0.06, 0.10]). No representative makes better use of their position on Appropriations than Hal Rogers. Rogers' credit claiming statements were about a wide array of expenditures. This includes small grants, such as when he "announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (USDA-RD) program has approved a \$41,523 grant for the Leslie County Sheriff's Department" (Rogers, 2009*a*) and larger expenditures, such as when he explained how an Appropriations bill that recently passed committee "included \$9.5 million for flood control and flood damage reduction activities" (Rogers, 2009*b*).

This section shows the systematic relationship between legislators' strategic incentives and their credit claiming propensity. Legislators who represent different types of districts adopt different credit claiming rates. The result of this process is that legislators will be differentially associated with spending in the district—making the dollar amount spent in the district insufficient to understand legislators' impression of influence.

3.3 What Legislators Claim Credit for Securing

So far we have shown that credit claiming rates matter because legislators have differential incentives to claim credit for spending that occurs in the district—so legislators will have differential association with spending in their district. A second reason that credit claiming matters is that it expands the set of activities legislators can claim credit for securing. In this section we show that legislators regularly claim credit for expenditures that are still far from the district or allocated primarily through executive agencies. One approach to demonstrating what legislators claim credit for would be to develop a more complex coding scheme, have our coders reclassify documents, and then refit our supervised learning method to collection of press releases. This, however, is difficult to implement. More nuanced coding schemes pose a challenge for even experienced coders. They tend to struggle to remember the rules, confuse terms, or over utilize particular categories. It is also difficult to identify the categories of expenditures before hand, with many potential diverse ways the government can spend money.

Rather than define the categories before hand, we use a statistical method that discovers a set of *topics* (Blei, Ng and Jordan, 2003; Quinn et al., 2010; Grimmer, 2010) and estimates how documents are divided across those topics. The particular model that we apply—Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)—defines a topic to be a set of words that tend to occur together across documents. For example, words like `highway`, `road`, `transportation`, and `bridge` are likely to co-occur as members of Congress claim credit for highway expenditures. Unlike our supervised methods that require us to specify topics before hand, LDA is an unsupervised method. This means that LDA discovers the topics that occur in documents. Given the set of topics, LDA

then estimates the proportion of the topics that occur in each document. LDA allows us to simultaneously identify what legislators claim credit for securing and how often legislators discuss those particular topics.

We applied LDA to the credit claiming press releases we identified in the previous section, estimating the model in MALLET. We set the number of topics at 25—a number that we arrived at using a substantive search from five to fifty topics. Following Quinn et al. (2010), we look for substantive topics that are not about particular sub-groups, such as states. Too few topics grouped together distinct spending topics—such as farming and highway expenditures. Too many topics and we had many location specific topics. 25 topics represented an excellent middle ground between the two extremes—capturing distinct topic areas without too many area specific topics.

Table 3.1 presents the estimated topics and their frequency in representatives' credit claiming messages. The first column provides a short, one word summary for each of the estimated topics. To obtain this, we read a random sample of about 10-15 press releases that have a large share of their content allocated to the topic (Quinn et al., 2010) and the second column contains words that occur with a high frequency under each topic. The third column measures the proportion of documents that are allocated to each of the topics

The topics in Table 3.1 reveal the diverse types of spending that legislators claim credit for. Detailed exploration shows the many stages in the appropriations process where legislators announce expenditures. This is evident in the most prevalent topic: *Requested appropriations*. These are expenditures that representatives have inserted into spending bills, but have yet to be allocated to the district. For example, in one press release Dave Camp (R-MI) “announced today that he was able to secure \$2.5

million for widening M-72 from US-31 easterly 7.2 miles to Old M-72” (Camp, 2005). Later, Camp explains that the funding actually has “two more hurdles to clear to make sure the money is in the bill when it hits the President’s desk: a vote in the Senate and a conference committee” (Camp, 2005). In a similar message, Mike Ross (D-AR) issued a press release stating that he “has successfully secured \$5,122,000 for Millwood Lake in the Fiscal Year 2010 House Energy & Water Appropriations Bill. The bill passed the full U.S. House of Representatives July 16” and that he would “continue fighting for these important infrastructure dollars as they move through the appropriations process. Upon passage of the Energy & Water Appropriations Bill in the Senate, the measure will then go to a Conference Committee” (Ross, 2009*a*). And Doc Hastings (R-WA) stated he “boosted federal funding for work on the Odessa Subaquifer for next year. This year Hastings has added \$1 million, which when combined with the funding in the President’s budget request, totals \$1.185 million for Fiscal Year 2008”, even though the funding had “been approved by the full House Appropriations Committee”—with a final passage vote in the House still needed (Hastings, 2007).

The prevalence of claiming credit for requests demonstrates that representatives believe they are able to use a broad set of actions to create an impression of influence over federal expenditures. Not only are legislators able to claim credit for spending once it has been finally approved, or when the expenditure actually occurs in the district. Legislators also claim credit for inserting an expenditure into a bill or even requesting an expenditure for the district. Rather than actual spending, then, legislators claim credit for actions that they perform in Washington. Even if those actions only may lead to spending in the district eventually.

Table 3.1: Credit Claiming Topics

Labels	Key Words	Proportion
Requested appropriations	bill,funding,house,million,appropriations	0.08
Fire department grants	fire,grant,department,program,firefighters	0.08
Stimulus	recovery,funding,jobs,information, act,	0.06
Bureaucratic compliance	state,federal,congress,states,secretary	0.06
Transportation	transportation,project,airport,transit,million	0.06
Local education	education,school,students,program,college	0.05
Grants	rep,grant,news,county,release	0.05
Economic development grants	development,economic,business,jobs,county	0.05
Water projects	water,project,river,projects,corps	0.04
Justice grants	enforcement,law,police,program,justice	0.04
Rural grants	rural,agriculture,usda,development,county	0.04
HUD/Block grants	housing,program,grants,home,families	0.03
Tax credits	tax,act,small,credit,bill	0.03
Health care	health,care,services,veterans,medical	0.03
Disaster declarations	disaster,assistance,fema,federal,emergency	0.03
Winter heating	liheap, rep,maine,funding,funds	0.03
National parks	national,park,jersey,land,area	0.03
Defense construction	military,defense,million,air,army	0.03
University research	research,university,technology,center,science	0.03
New York projects	york,rep,hinchey,ny,federal	0.03
Energy projects	energy,renewable,efficiency,oil,fuel	0.02
Ribbon cutting/Assistance	county,florida,rep,office,north	0.02
Arkansas projects	arkansas,connecticut,state,washington,rep	0.02
Local disaster declarations	rep,san,california,county,maryland	0.02
Homeland security	security,homeland,border,million,emergency	0.02

This table shows what legislators discuss in their credit claiming statements.

The second most prevalent topic in credit claiming press releases cover *fire department* grants, which legislators use to create an impression that they influenced executive branch spending in their district. Yet, legislators have only an indirect role in the fire department program. The fire department grant that legislators are claiming credit for are small, executive-branch expenditures made to local fire departments through the Assistant to Firefighter Grant Program (AFGP)—a FEMA administered

competitive grant program (see Chapter 6). Such credit claiming occurs regularly, even though the grants are relatively small. For example, Brian Higgins (D-NY) used a press release to “announce Walden Fire District will receive \$75,259 in federal funding through the Assistance to Firefighters Grants Program (AFGP) for fiscal year 2005” (Higgins, 2006). In another press release, Mike Rogers (R-AL), “congratulated the men and women of the Mount Olive Volunteer Fire Department and County Line Volunteer Fire Department today for receiving grants from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security”. The press release went on to explain that “the Mount Olive Volunteer Fire Department should receive \$26,125 in funding and the County Line Volunteer Fire Department should receive \$16,957 in funding to help purchase operations and safety equipment” (Rogers, 2008*b*). Even smaller expenditures receive Rogers attention: in one press release he “congratulated the men and women of the Daviston Volunteer Fire Department today for receiving a \$9,975 grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security” (Rogers, 2007). Even Appropriations cardinals claim credit for fire grants. David Obey—while chair of the Appropriations committee in 2007— issued a press release where he “applauded the release of a \$94,196 federal fire grant to the Antigo Fire Department” (Obey, 2007). Legislators’ credit claiming over bureaucrats funding decisions are not limited to fire grants. Table 3.1 shows that representatives’ take advantage of a wide array of expenditures allocated through grants. This includes economic development grants for towns, justice department grants for police, grants for rural economic development, and urban block grants to help cities function.

Legislators also claim credit for ensuring wayward bureaucracies deliver necessary funds or encouraging Congressional commissions to reconsider their decisions to shift

funds away from the district (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987). For example, Tom Udall (D-NM) issued a press release to say that he and other members of the New Mexico delegation met “with members of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission” where they “ tackled the flawed reasoning behind the Pentagon’s decision to target Cannon Air Force Base for closure and expressed appreciation that the commission seems receptive to additional information that might save the base” (Udall, 2005). The credit claiming press releases can defend other military jobs. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) stated that “in an effort to save local jobs, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, today formally announced that he will soon introduce a measure in Congress that would block a recent Pentagon decision to privatize hundreds of inherently government jobs at West Point” (Hinchey, 2009).

3.4 The Amount Legislators Claim to Have Delivered

Legislators tend to claim credit for relatively small amounts of money. Examples are numerous in our collection of press releases. Henry Cuellar (D-TX) issued a press release where he “announced \$26,000 in funds for the City of Lourdanton Police Department...The funds are part of an earmark to an appropriations bill that Rep. Cuellar helped to secure” (Cuellar, 2005). With only slightly larger expenditures, Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ) “announced that \$30,400 in federal funding has been awarded to Clayton Volunteer Ambulance Inc. from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG)” (LoBiondo, 2006*b*), Gwen Moore (D-WI) “announced that the city of

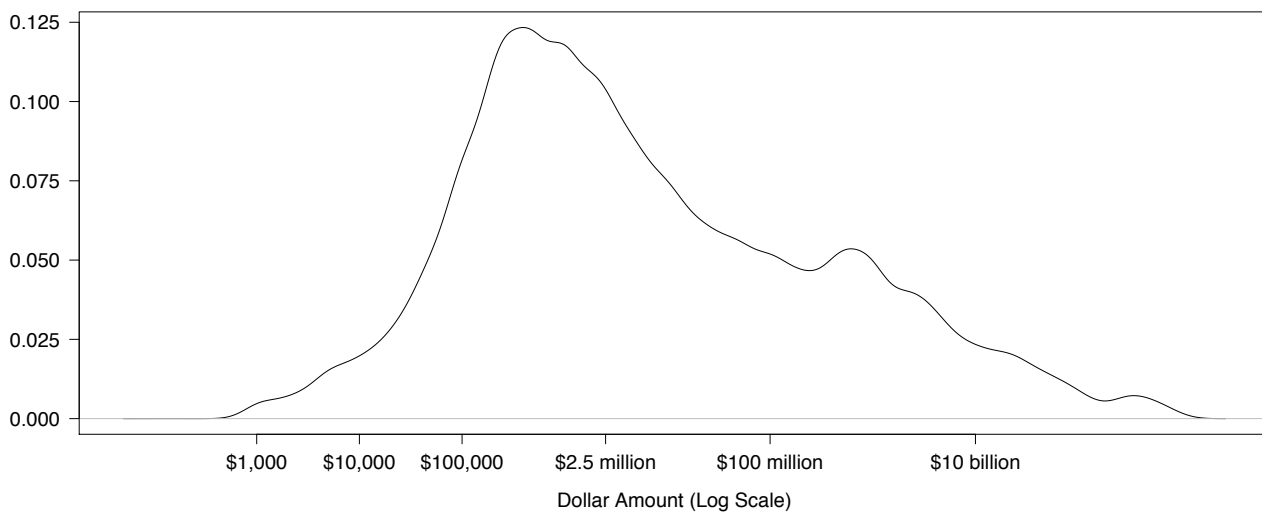
West Allis will today receive the first \$100,000 of \$576,200 in Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG) that it has been obligated under the Recovery Act” (Moore, 2006), Mike McIntyre (D-NC) “announced today that the Public Schools of Robeson County will receive \$1,212,750.77 to help with Internet infrastructure” (McIntyre, 2006), and Mike Rogers (R-MI) “congratulated the Knightens Crossroad Volunteer Fire Department today for receiving a \$115,200 grant” (Rogers, 2005).

The examples are useful for illuminating the size of the expenditures in credit claiming statements, but are not systematic evidence of the dollar amounts legislators claim credit for delivering to the district. The best systematic evidence would provide the dollar amounts discussed in all of our credit claiming press releases. Extracting this information by hand—or with the types of natural language processing commonly used in political science (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013)—is an exceedingly difficult task. Variations in how units are reported—1 million dollars or \$1 million—and variations in notation—\$1,100,000 or \$1.1 million—make manual extraction nearly impossible. Even with a small sample of press releases it would be difficult to extract the dollar amount claimed—requiring a very careful and close reading of the entire press release. Identifying the amount discussed across all press releases would be essentially infeasible, requiring an army of coders and substantial time.

Rather than extract the information by hand, we use computational tools. Specifically, we use the *Named Entity Recognizer* (NER) in the Stanford CoreNLP Library (Finkel, Grenager and Manning, 2005). The named entity extraction classifies the types of objects—entities—that occur in sentences. We use the software to identify dollar figures that are discussed in press releases. To do this, the model exploits

the structure of sentences to identify entities in sentences and uses the same sentence structure to determine if the entity is a dollar amount. Applying this algorithm produces our ideal data set: a collection of all the money (with appropriate units) discussed in each press release. We then restrict our attention to the credit claiming press releases to identify what legislators claim credit for securing.

Figure 3.6: Legislators Regularly Claim Credit for Small Expenditures



This figure shows the distribution of dollar figures discussed in credit claiming press releases. Legislators regularly discuss very small amounts and the majority of figures discussed are only a small amount—less than \$2.5 million.

Figure 3.6 presents all the dollar figures discussed in credit claiming press releases. The horizontal axis is the dollar amount claimed, on a log-scale though we provide labels in actual dollar amounts to ease interpretation. Figure 3.6 reveals several instances of legislators claiming credit for very small amounts of money—some as little as \$1,000. For example, Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) “announced that the National Endowment for the Humanities has made a grant to the Old Red Museum of Dallas

County History & Culture. The museum will use the \$1,000 grant to support its Transportation Fair, ‘Stagecoaches to Segways: Celebrating Transportation of Dallas County’s Past, Present and Future’” (Johnson, 2008) and Jim McDermott (D-WA) “presented a check for \$1,000 to the Lifelong AIDS Alliance at the beginning of the 21st AIDS Walk over the weekend in Seattle” (McDermott, 2007). This was not an isolated incident—legislators from all parts of the country and both parties claimed credit for small amounts of money. Doc Hastings (R-WA) issued a press release to announce that the “Chelan County Fire District # 3 will receive \$13,737 from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program” (Hastings, 2008). Bart Stupak “announced Alcona, Iosco, Menominee, Montmorency, Ontonagon and Oscoda Counties have received grants totaling \$65,250 to provide shelter, food and support services to assist individuals in northern Michigan currently facing economic crisis.” This announcement included a \$7,950 grant for Alcona County (Stupak, 2010*a*). Representatives and senators will even issue joint press releases to claim credit for small expenditures. One press release declared that “Mike Ross [R-AR] along with U.S. Senators Blanche Lincoln [D-AR] and Mark Pryor [D-AR] today announced that Nevada County will receive a \$17,000 Rural Development grant from the Department of Agriculture to help repair three malfunctioning tornado sirens” (Ross, 2009*b*).

Discussions of small amounts of money—like the examples provided—occur regularly in credit claiming press releases. 19.0% of credit claiming press releases reference an expenditure of \$50,000 or less, and 24.1% of credit claiming press releases contain a dollar amount that is \$100,000 or less. This amounts to claiming credit for—at most—about \$0.16 per resident. Larger dollar amounts are discussed, but even these figures are still relatively small. For example, in another joint press release “Sen. Edward

M. Kennedy [D-MA], Sen. John F. Kerry [D-MA], and Rep. John W. Olver [D-MA] announced today that the U.S. House of Representatives has approved the Interior Appropriations conference report containing \$650,000 in funding for land acquisition in the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge” (Olver, 2005). Other announcements list relatively small expenditures. Bud Cramer (D-AL) issued a press release stating that “North Alabama will receive funding for the following projects: \$10 million for the Patton Island Bridge Corridor, \$3 million for the Huntsville Southern Bypass, \$1 million for the Interchange at I-65 and Limestone County Road 24, \$1 million for the Jackson County Industrial Park Access Road” (Cramer Jr, 2005). And Hal Rogers (R-KY)—a powerful member of the Appropriations committee—often claims credit for securing relatively small amounts for targeted programs in his district, like the drug treatment program Operation UNITE. In a press release Rogers “announced today that \$1.15 million for Operation UNITE was approved by a key congressional subcommittee” (Rogers, 2008a).

The dollar amounts claimed in these press releases are indicative of the types of expenditures that legislators discuss with constituents. Across all credit claiming press releases, the median expenditure discussed is \$2.85 million. This amount, though, is an overestimate of what legislators claim credit for securing. In many press releases legislators will discuss the cost of the entire bill—which they do not have a plausible claim to enacting (Mayhew, 1974)—and then describe the amount allocated to the district. To account for this, we can take the median of the amounts discussed in each press release—which is more likely to reflect the amount claimed in the press release. The median of the median amount claimed in each press release is \$1.7 million—only about \$2.86 per resident in the district.

3.5 Conclusion

Together, the evidence of this chapter shows why legislators' impression of influence over expenditures matters for understanding how legislators receive credit for particularistic spending in the district. Representatives differ in the extent to which they associate themselves with spending in the district. Some legislators have a strong incentive to pursue a personal vote—their reelection coalitions depend on winning the support of independents and even some opposing partisans. Other legislators, however, have a strong incentive to appeal to their copartisans, so they allocate a smaller share of their press releases to credit claiming. If representatives regularly attach themselves to spending in the district then we expect—and we show in subsequent chapters—that representatives will be perceived as more efficacious at delivering money to the district. Legislators who do not engage in this credit claiming will not have the same association and will not receive the same benefit. Spending alone could help legislators cultivate a personal vote, but claiming credit makes it more likely that constituents will reward legislators for expenditures in the district.

We also show that the opportunity to claim credit extends far beyond money actually being spent in the district and for projects of many different sizes. Legislators claim credit for appropriations as they move through the institution—even when money is far from being spent in the district or will not be spent for some time, legislators are able to claim credit for the spending. And legislators need not have a direct role in securing the money. Legislators are able to create an impression of influence across a variety of actions—the opportunities are expansive and regularly occurring. The opportunities are only loosely constrained by size—legislators are happy to claim credit for small expenditures in their districts.

When legislators engage in the types of credit claiming that we describe in this chapter they shape their relationship with constituents (Grimmer, 2013). Credit claiming efforts are one example of how legislators attempt to dictate the terms of evaluation to constituents. When legislators regularly claim credit for money spent in the district, they are inviting constituents to perform evaluations based on the extent and type of federal projects in the district, but when legislators avoid discussing spending they are encouraging more ideological and partisan evaluations. This shift in evaluation may help explain the incumbency advantage and explain how legislators attempt to cultivate leeway (Fenno, 1978). It also has broad, though ambivalent, normative implications—a point we address in this book’s conclusion.

Chapter 4

Creating an Impression, Not Just Increasing Name Recognition

The previous chapter demonstrates how often legislators use credit claiming statements to cultivate support and what legislators claim credit for delivering to (or requesting for) the district. This strategic credit claiming, we argue, helps legislators cultivate an impression of influence over expenditures and, in turn, build a personal vote with constituents. Before providing direct evidence of how constituents allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages, we consider a simpler explanation for why legislators claim credit: to increase name recognition. Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987) first demonstrated that incumbents have a substantial advantage in name recognition, an advantage that grew at the same time as the incumbency advantage. To increase this recognition, Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987) argue, legislators work outside of Congress and engage constituents in the district. Constituency service is part of this engagement: members of Congress use their staff to help constituents navigate the complicated federal bureaucracy. Legislators also

maintain prominent district offices (Fiorina, 1981; Rivers and Fiorina, 1989), make regular appearances in the district (Fenno, 1978), send newsletters to constituents (Lipinski, 2004), and use non-political *advertising* statements to bolster their name recognition (Mayhew, 1974).

There are also psychological mechanisms to explain why name recognition will cultivate support among constituents. A large psychological literature documents how “mere exposure” to an entity causes people to more positively evaluate it (Zajonc, 2001). When applied to name recognition, this implies that constituents who repeatedly see their representative’s name are more likely to have positive feelings toward the legislators and, in turn, to support the representative on Election Day.

A reasonable explanation for why legislators engage in credit claiming, then, is that they are merely trying to bolster their recognition among constituents. This certainly is true—credit claiming provides legislators the opportunity to disseminate their name to constituents. But we show in this chapter that credit claiming does much more than just increase name recognition and that mere exposure alone fails to explain how credit claiming bolsters support. We use an experiment to show that credit claiming also helps legislators cultivate an impression of influence over federal spending. The result is that credit claiming statements cause a larger increase in support for legislators than other non-partisan statements.

Credit claiming is not just a means for legislators to make them recognizable among constituents. It is also a tool for representatives to create the appearance of effective representation for the district. In addition to presenting this finding, this chapter introduces our methodology for assessing how legislators cultivate support

with credit claiming messages. While the mode of delivery and format of the messages varies, we infer how credit claiming messages affect constituent credit allocation using randomized experiments, embedded in a survey (Sniderman and Grob, 1996). Experiments are useful for assessing the effects of credit claiming messages because they allow us control over who sees the messages. This eliminates the possibility of confounding. Experiments also enable us to have precise control over the content of the messages. This gives us the granular information necessary to test subtle hypotheses about how constituents respond to legislators' credit claiming messages. As we explain in this chapter, we design our experiments to correspond as much as possible with how legislators actually engage in credit claiming. Of course, demonstrating conclusively the external validity of our studies is close to impossible. But we couple our experiments with observational evidence that corroborates our experimental manipulations.

Before explaining why experimental analyses of legislators' credit claiming messages are useful, we first explain why we expect credit claiming statements to have distinct and additional effects over other non-partisan types of speech.

4.1 Why Credit Claiming Differs from Other Non-Partisan Messages

Political scientists have shown the power of name recognition to win elections. Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987) argued that the rise in the incumbency advantage was to a large extent due to an increase in legislators' name recognition. They show—and a wide array of subsequent scholarship confirms—that the public readily identifies

their member of Congress, an advantage when voters are deciding who to support in the voting booth. Politicians and political consultants recognize the value of name recognition—early decisions about whether to enter a race are often based on a candidate’s name recognition.

Legislators strategically use the tools of their office to bolster their name recognition among constituents (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987). In this chapter we focus on one tool for increasing name recognition: *advertising* messages. Mayhew (1974) defines advertising “as any effort to disseminate one’s name among constituents in such a fashion as to create a favorable image but in messages that have little or no issue content” (Mayhew, 1974, 49). Opportunities for legislators to engage in advertising are bountiful. For example, each year Congress holds an art contest, with a potential winner from each district. The art contest provides numerous opportunities for legislators to advertise. At the start of the contest, members of Congress announce that they are accepting submissions. For example, Todd Rokita (R-IN) issued a press release where he advertised that “Representative Todd Rokita has announced that his office will be accepting entries for the annual Congressional Art Competition starting today” (Rokita, 2012*a*). Legislators, such as Rokita, also take the opportunity to announce the winner. Two months after announcing the contest, Rokita issued a press releases announcing that “[e]arlier today, U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita met in Washington with 4th District Congressional Art Competition winner Annie Hegarty, a junior at Jefferson High School in Lafayette” (Rokita, 2012*b*). Legislators take advantage of many other opportunities to increase name recognition. This includes announcing residents appointed to military academies, congratulating local sports teams on championships, commemorating national holidays, or discussing symbolic ceremonies

of personal interest to constituents.

Credit claiming statements do increase legislators' name recognition. Credit claiming reminds constituents of their representative and her name—increasing the chance that constituents will feel more familiar and more supportive. But credit claiming messages also show how legislators work in Washington to improve life in the district. Legislators inform constituents about actions that are performed and tangible benefits that will be delivered to the district—presumably because the legislator acted in Congress. And when composing the messages, legislators and their staff make this information easy to access, ensuring that even inattentive constituents will recognize the distinct content in the credit claiming statement (Hassin, Bargh and Uleman, 2002).

Credit claiming are effective at creating an impression of influence over federal disbursements because constituents can easily identify the distinct content of the messages. This implies that credit claiming statements cause constituents to perceive their member of Congress as more effective at delivering money to the district. And because constituents value representatives who are effective at delivering particularistic resources to the district (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987), credit claiming statements provide a bigger overall increase in support than advertising messages. Put simply: constituents reward legislators who appear effective at delivering for the district and credit claiming press releases provide legislators the opportunity to explain how and what they deliver.

Credit claiming messages should bolster support among constituents more than advertising messages. This also suggests a simple goal for this chapter: to test whether credit claiming press releases actually do provide a larger increase in support for

legislators than simple advertising messages. To make this determination, we use an experiment to vary the content of messages and to identify their effect. This is part of our more general strategy in this book— we use experiments to identify the effect of legislators’ credit claiming messages on constituents.

4.2 Why We Use Experiments to Evaluate the Effects of Credit Claiming

When previous scholars assessed the consequences of legislators’ direct engagement of constituents, they have tended to use observational designs (Fenno, 1978; Fiorina, 1981; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987; Lipinski, 2004; Grimmer, 2013). Scholars examine the relationship between legislators’ actual actions and constituents’ actual votes or expressed support (Holland, 1986; Dunning, 2012). To infer the causal effect of the actions, studies use information about legislators and constituents and then a statistical model to limit the influence of confounding factors.

Observational studies are essential for understanding representation. They provide detailed information about what legislators do to cultivate support and provide raw correlations that reveal how legislators’ strategies covary with the characteristics of the district and time in office. But establishing a causal relationship of legislators’ credit claiming strategies from observational data is difficult (Caughey and Sekhon, 2012; Sekhon and Titiumik, 2012). This is due, in part, because of the strategic nature of how legislators use the tools of office. For example, in Chapter 3 we demonstrated that more marginal representatives tend to claim credit more often than legislators who are more aligned with their districts. More marginal representatives also tend

to face stronger competition in general elections (Brady, Han and Pope, 2007). This could cause a perverse pattern to occur in observational data: credit claiming statements may appear to have a small or null effect because the legislators using the statements the most are also the legislators facing the toughest reelection campaigns (see, for example, Bickers et al. (2007)). This is a more general problem when studying how legislators cultivate constituent support. Fiorina (1981) argues that legislators' campaign and legislative efforts are responsive to the characteristics of upcoming elections or the district. This leads to similar perverse correlations, with increases in legislative effort appearing to decrease support. As Fiorina (1981) writes the negative correlation between effort and vote share occurs because, “‘good,’ attentive, hard-working incumbents can ‘work’ a marginal seat until it appears safe, *for them*” (emphasis in original, (Fiorina, 1981, 545)). For example, campaign spending is negatively correlated with vote share, because incumbents spend more money when they are facing tough electoral competition (Jacobson, 1978; Gerber, 1998; Erikson and Palfrey, 2000). And engaging the district—with visits, increased staff expenditures, or more district offices—are all unrelated to a legislator's electoral support (Fiorina, 1981).

Observational data is also too coarse to test specific hypotheses about how the content of credit claiming messages affects constituent credit allocation. Previous observational studies of the effects of legislators' statements had only aggregated measures of the content of legislators' statements and occasional measures of constituents support (Lipinski, 2004; Bickers et al., 2007; Grimmer, 2013). This coarseness makes evaluating our more subtle hypotheses about how constituents evaluate the content of *individual messages* impossible. To perform our tests, we need specific control

over the content of messages and we need to assess how constituents respond to the content of those specific messages.

We address the problems of strategic legislators and coarse data with a series of credit claiming experiments. Using credit claiming messages from actual legislators as a template, we create a series of fictitious credit claiming messages. We intentionally crafted the messages to strongly resemble legislators' actual credit claiming statements. So, our experimental prompts use the same language and are about similar kind of expenditures discussed in actual credit claiming statements. With the templates as a device to deliver our interventions, we then randomly assign participants to read distinct content, which constitutes our interventions. The randomization ensures that our experiments are internally valid—it will identify the causal effect of our intervention for the population included in our study.

Where possible, we designed our experiments to push beyond internal validity. In our experimental designs, we also strive for ecological validity. When designing our experimental protocol, we attempt to replicate how legislators actually claim credit for spending in the district. To bolster ecological validity—the extent to which our interventions replicate credit claiming messages that legislators actually send—most of our experiments send fictitious credit claiming messages ostensibly from our participants' actual members of Congress. (We are sure to debrief our participants at the end of the intervention). We accomplish this by using information we collect about each participant's location. We also provide additional contextual information about the participant's Congressional district and state.

We also design several of our studies to diminish the possibility of demand effects (Orne, 1969): we constructed experiments to diminish the possibility that our design

might unintentionally inform participants about the goal of our study, leading participants to try and conform with that goal. In some of our experiments—such as the experiment in this chapter—our participants never knew they were in an experiment until after the study was over. (Again, we thoroughly debriefed participants after completing our study). In other studies we designed our treatments and questions to minimize the chance that our participants could infer our goal. Some of our designs are subtle, making it difficult for participant demand to explain our results. In other designs where the risk of participant demand is more real, we ask questions about overall evaluations first—ensuring constituents would not conclude we are conducting a study of how government spending builds support for legislators.

We also make concerted efforts to increase the external validity of our experimental results. Many of our experiments are administered on respondents who are representative of the US population. Most of our studies are conducted as experiments embedded in nationally representative surveys (Sniderman and Grob, 1996; Gaines, Kuklinski and Quirk, 2007). And even when we deviate from nationally representative samples, we suspect our results still provide accurate assessments of how constituents respond to credit claiming statements. To conduct more complicated experimental designs—such as the experiment we present in this chapter—we use a less representative sample collected using Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk service. While Mechanical Turk samples have a different composition than nationally representative samples, respondents replicate results from classic experiments and are more representative than typical experimental pools, such as college students (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz, 2012).

And our results are stable. To show this stability, we replicate our experimental re-

sults in multiple experiments: we show that our findings occur in distinct populations and, where possible, through related though distinct interventions. The replication of our results compliments the recent movement to prevent fishing in the analysis of experiments—the deceptive practice of analyzing many dependent variables in order to find a statistically significant result (Humphreys, Sanchez de la Sierra and van der Windt, 2013). A community of scholars have proposed publicizing an analysis plan before receiving the data. This ties scholars’ hands, limiting the potential to find ephemeral results through fishing. Our use of replication has a similar effect, but suggests our results are even more stable than if we had proposed a pre-analysis plan. Not only do our results emerge organically in the context of our experiments, they are found in new survey populations and with related, though distinct, interventions.

Of course, a threat to our findings is that the types of experimental interventions that we deliver to our participants may occur only rarely in actual politics or are much stronger than constituents actually encounter. Demonstrating conclusively that this risk is not salient is essentially impossible—it plagues nearly every experimental study. That said, when analyzing our experiments we also introduce observational evidence that raises our confidence that our experimental results are realistic. Using the observational evidence we explain how constituents tend to encounter messages, or we abandon experimental control and assess the relationship between legislators’ actual credit claiming rates and constituent evaluations. The observational data provide further evidence for the validity of our experiments.

We use experiments because they provide powerful tools for understanding how legislators’ messages matter for representation around spending. With this motivation, we present our first experiment in the next section. Using an experiment

embedded in an online social media website, we show that credit claiming messages do more than just bolster name recognition.

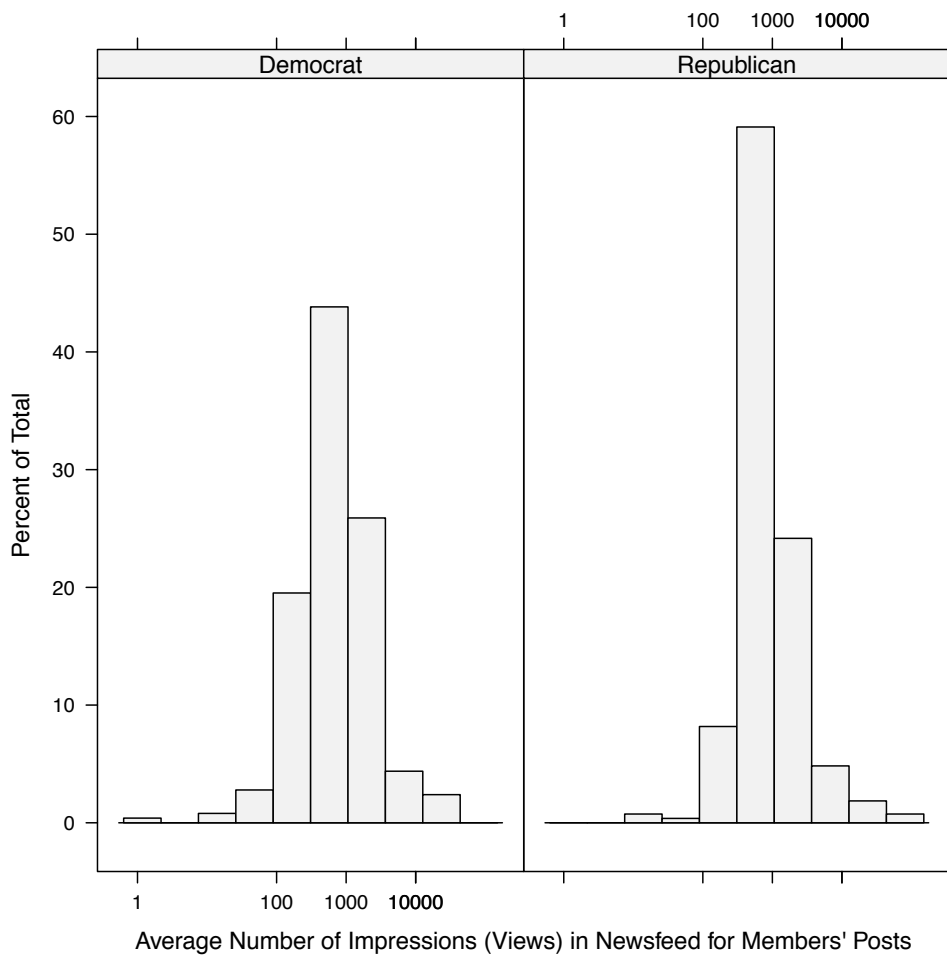
4.3 Study 1: Isolating the Effects of Credit Claiming Statements

To isolate the distinct effects of credit claiming, we conducted an experiment in a setting where constituents could plausibly encounter legislator messages: Facebook, a popular social media website. To demonstrate how legislators use social media and how constituents respond we examined Facebook data. Specifically, we selected a 3 month period and gathered data on how often legislators posted to their accounts and how many times those posts actually appeared in Facebook users' news feeds. News feeds provide information automatically upon logging into Facebook. Legislators post regularly on Facebook and have fairly large followings. The median House member has 3908 fans—or Facebook account holders who have liked their page and can automatically receive content legislators publish. Over a 3 month period, the average legislator posted 103 messages to their pages and the median representative posts about 79 messages to their page.

And these messages appear to be regularly consumed. Figure 4.1 shows the number of Facebook users who saw each post, by party of the representative. Because the histograms have a long right-hand tail we took a logarithm of this total, but we have exponentiated the horizontal axis to aid in interpretation. The median post receives 616 total views, the third quartile of posts receives 1368, while some posts reach upwards of 200 thousand viewers. And, each representative publishes many such posts,

upwards of one hundred on average. Further, this is just one component of legislators broader media strategies, which includes many other forms of media—including newsletters sent directly to constituents.

Figure 4.1: The Reach of Congressional Facebook Posts



This figure shows the distribution of the average number of views in Newsfeed for each member's posts on Facebook.

To conduct our experiment we created a proprietary application for Facebook

called the *US Congressional Connection*. The use of Facebook and the proprietary application allows us to minimize the chance of demand effects. Our participants did not know they were participating in an experiment—instead they were told that they were assisting a group of Stanford researchers who wanted to evaluate a new Facebook application, designed to connect constituents with their representative in Congress. Our experiment also involved real members of Congress. Our application sent messages ostensibly from *actual* members of Congress—though we fabricated the content—to our participants’ Facebook account. (We thoroughly debriefed our respondents after our experiment was conducted, ensuring no mistaken impressions remain).

Implementing this design using standard experimental tools is difficult and, perhaps, impossible. Survey experiments, because they can credibly claim to measure a treatment effect on a representative sample, have become a popular experimental tool. However, survey experiments are unable to accommodate our multi-day experiments, nor can they deliver multiple treatments in isolation from data collection. We want to emphasize that this is not meant as a critique on using survey methods. We will present results from a series of experiments embedded in surveys to understand the effect of credit claiming messages on constituents, but when our focus is on conducting experiments in plausible contexts, survey experiments are less useful.

Another popular alternative experimental population, convenience samples of college students, are also unattractive for our experiment. College students will tend to concentrate in only a few Congressional districts (even at universities that draw applications nationally) and the subset of the population who are probably least interested in particularistic spending in their home districts.

As we describe in the previous section, as an alternative we use Amazon’s *Mechanical Turk* service to recruit participants for our experiment. Berinsky, Huber and Lenz (2012) show that this service provides a sample more representative than most in-person convenience samples and that Mechanical Turk experimental participants replicate experimental benchmarks. And our sample used in this chapter replicates this finding: our sample of respondents are more diverse than a typical sample of college students, though not representative of the U.S. as a whole. Further, the correlations in our sample closely follow correlations in benchmark survey data: Democrats, Republicans, liberals, and conservatives in our sample respond like Democrats, Republicans, liberals and conservatives in other studies. The high quality of our Mechanical Turk recruited participants is an often replicated finding. Validation studies conducted in other fields demonstrate the effectiveness of Mechanical Turk (Buhrmester, Kwang and Gosling, 2011; Sprouse, 2011). These studies show that Mechanical Turk and traditional laboratory subjects are nearly indistinguishable—both in replicating recent experiments (Sprouse, 2011) and in reproducing the results of classic experiments (Buhrmester, Kwang and Gosling, 2011). To increase the internal validity of our study, we used a series of questions that assess whether the subjects were engaged with our pre-test and post-test battery of questions.

While recruiting experiment participants through Mechanical Turk may seem novel, it provides several advantages over survey or lab experiments.¹ As mentioned before, it makes it possible for us to use a social media website, a setting where legislators actually conduct credit claiming efforts. Our measurement strategy also separates exposure to a treatment and the measurement of its effect. All of our

¹It is also very common in other fields—including Communication, Psychology, Economics, and Linguistics.

post-experiment surveys are conducted on the day after the treatment is completed. Together, recruiting participants through Mechanical Turk provides a powerful tool for isolating the distinct effects of credit claiming messages.

Using Mechanical Turk, we recruited 462 participants to participate in our study. After completing a preliminary survey and providing a 9-digit zip code (we assisted participants in obtaining this), we directed participants to install our Facebook application.² Upon installation of the application, participants were randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions. In our *control* condition no messages were sent to the participant. Maintaining the true control condition ensures that we have a credible baseline to compare the effects of repeated exposure to information. In our *credit claiming* condition subjects were sent credit claiming messages from their representative. The amount, content, and subject of each credit claiming message varies over each day and are representative of the types of projects legislators claim credit for obtaining and the amount obtained. And in our *advertising* condition subjects were sent messages with minimal political consequence, but that advertised the legislator’s name. Again the content of the messages reflect the type messages legislators commonly send constituents. This condition is analogous to a placebo-control group—it allows us to disentangle the effect of credit claiming from the effect of merely contacting constituents and informing them about their representative.

Table 4.1 contains two example posts, as they appear on our server and before they were rendered and sent to our subjects. After identifying the subject’s legislator, we fill in the information in Table 4.1 with the legislator’s information—creating the impression of a press release from the subject’s representative. For example, at

²Nine-digit zip codes are necessary to avoid ambiguities about representatives whose districts overlap in five-digit zip codes.

each instance of |lastName in Table 4.1 we placed the legislator’s last name and at each instance of |party we place the legislator’s party. To ensure that our messages closely approximated the actual statements legislators would issue, we based all our manipulations on actual press releases.

For five consecutive days participants received different messages from our application that corresponded to their assigned treatment. These messages displayed in the participant’s news feed. Our story appeared naturally in the news feed, which also contains information about the participant’s “friends” and displays content they recommend. The news feed also displays “subscribed” content—often from media outlets and public officials. The left-hand image in Figure 4.2 provides an example of one post from our manipulation as it appears in a subject’s news feed. The headlines and short descriptions of each message were chosen so that they contain the desired treatment: our subjects received the treatment without any additional action. If subjects did click on the provided link they received the entire statement. The right-hand image in in Figure 4.2 provides an example of an actual statement on Facebook from Anna Eshoo (D-CA). The striking similarity between our manipulation and actual content illustrates our experiment’s ecological validity. After five days, participants were asked to complete a post-study survey, where we ask a battery of questions designed to assess the effects of our interventions.³ Participants answered representative identification questions first, then questions about attitudes towards the representative, and finally questions about the performance of the representative. All questions

³The five days of messages represent a strong treatment, though a treatment useful for examining differences in response to legislators’ messages. An important variation on our experiment would be to examine how longer delays between treatments, longer delays in collecting participants’ responses affect our results. Alternatively, we could conduct an analogous experiment before an election and record actual voting behavior.

were randomized within the three blocks.⁴

Figure 4.2: Example Message from Our Facebook Application, Compared to Actual Credit Claiming on Facebook



This figure compares a message from our application that is ostensibly from Anna Eshoo (D-CA) (left-hand picture) to an actual credit claiming message from Anna Eshoo (right-hand picture). The strong resemblance is evidence of the ecological validity of our treatments.

Table 4.2 summarizes the results across the experimental conditions (rows) and for four dependent variables (the columns). In the first column we provide a manipulation check: demonstrating that participants assigned to the advertising (top row) and credit claiming (middle row) conditions were significantly more likely to select their legislator in a multiple choice quiz than participants assigned to the control condition (bottom-line). When compared to the control group, participants assigned to receive advertising press releases were 29 percentage points more likely to select the correct representative (95% confidence interval [0.20, 0.39]), while participants

⁴This study was conducted in the summer of 2011 on the pre-Timeline version of Facebook.

assigned to receive credit claiming messages were 32 percentage points more likely to identify the correct legislator (95% confidence interval [0.22, 0.41]). As the prior literature predicts, either type of message bolsters legislators' name recognition among constituents (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987). The increased name recognition among our two treatment conditions also serves as a manipulation check: evidence that our participants are exposed to the messages associated with their treatments.

Both credit claiming and advertising messages increase a legislator's name recognition. But credit claiming messages cultivate an impression of influence—leading constituents to believe that their legislator is more effective at delivering money to the district and passing beneficial legislation. The second column shows that subjects in the credit claiming condition rated their legislator as more effective at delivering federal money to the district. Subjects were asked to rate how effective their representative has been at “bringing federal money to your community” on a seven-point scale. Credit claiming statements cause legislators to receive an increase in their perceived effectiveness of delivering money to the district. Subjects in the credit claiming condition rated their representative 0.80 units higher than evaluations in the control condition (95% confidence interval [0.48, 1.12]) and 0.49 units more effective than participants assigned to the advertising condition (95% confidence interval [0.16, 0.82]).⁵ The third column shows that subjects in the credit claiming position also rated their legislator as more effective at “passing legislation that helps your community” on the same seven point scale. Subjects assigned to the credit claiming condition rated their representative 0.78 units more effective than the control condition (95% confi-

⁵Participants assigned to the advertising condition also rated their legislators slightly more effective at delivering money than participants assigned to the control condition. This small increase is consistent with studies demonstrating that merely exposing participants to information about an individual can raise familiarity and cause increases in evaluations in unrelated areas (Zajonc, 2001).

dence interval [0.46, 1.11]) and 0.55 units more effective than those assigned to the advertising condition (95% confidence interval, [0.21,0.88]).

Credit claiming messages cause an increase in perceived effectiveness, causing legislators to be more positively evaluated. The fourth column in Table 4.2 shows that credit claiming messages are more effective at cultivating support than advertising messages. Following a wide array of studies (for example, Stein and Bickers 1994), we measure the effect of our experiment on constituent evaluations using a 100 point feeling thermometer: a score of “0” is the lowest possible score and a score of “100” is the highest possible rating. Subjects assigned to the credit claiming condition had an increase in average feeling thermometer rating of 10.85 points over the control condition (95% confidence interval [4.87, 16.83]) and an increase in average thermometer rating of 5.69 points over the advertising condition (95% confidence interval [-0.27, 11.65]).

This is a substantial increase in favorability—nearly as large as the increase in favorability associated with having a co-partisan representative. Among our control group, copartisans rated their representative 13.56 units higher. Credit claiming messages increased the average rating of representatives 10.85 units over the control group—an effect 80% the size of the copartisan difference—and 5.69 units over the advertising group—an effect 42% of the size.

Table 4.1: Example Templates for Facebook Posts

Credit Claiming	Advertising
<p>Headline: Local Fire Departments to Receive Over \$68,000 for Operations and Firefighter Safety</p> <p>Short description: A total of \$68,763 in grants for operations and safety programs were awarded to local fire departments from the Department of Homeland Security, Rep. lastName announced.</p> <p>Full text: A total of \$68,763 in grants for operations and safety programs was awarded to local fire departments from the Department of Homeland Security, Rep. NAME announced.</p> <p> firstName lastName (party- state) announced the grants today. Specifically, the grant will be used to improve training, equipment, and make modifications to fire stations and facilities in local fire departments.</p> <p>“This is great news for our local community,” said Representative lastName. “With these funds, our local fire departments will continue to train and operate with the latest in firefighter technology.”</p>	<p>Headline: Rep. lastName: Local Student Wins Art Contest</p> <p>Short description: Rep. firstName lastName, party- state, announced that 17-year-old Sara Fischer won first place in the annual congressional district art competition.</p> <p>Full text:</p> <p>Rep. firstName lastName, (party- state), announced that 17-year-old Sara Fischer won first place in the annual congressional district art competition.</p> <p>Sara’s winning art, “Medals,” was created using colored pencils. lastName said Sara’s artwork will be displayed in the U.S. Capitol with other winning entries from districts nationwide.</p> <p>Sara is a senior in high school, and will study art and political science at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., beginning this fall.</p> <p>“Sara is a very talented young person,” lastName said. “The congressional art competition is vigorous, and Sara should be very proud of her talents and efforts.”</p> <p>Each year, lastName hosts the competition for all local high school students and enlists the help of local art leaders to serve as judges for the special event.</p> <p>More than 20 students participated in this year’s art competition.</p>
<p>Key</p> <p> lastName: The representative’s last name</p> <p> firstName: The representative’s first name</p> <p> party: The representative’s party 118</p> <p> state: The representative’s state</p>	

Table 4.2: The Effect of Credit Claiming and Advertising on Constituents

Condition	Identify Name	Delivering Money	Passing District Legislation	Legislator Feeling Thermometer
Advertising	0.87 [0.81, 0.93]	3.99 [3.77, 4.21]	3.96 [3.73, 4.19]	50.32 [46.22, 54.43]
Credit Claiming	0.90 [0.83, 0.96]	4.49 [4.26, 4.71]	4.51 [4.27, 4.74]	56.01 [51.75, 60.27]
Control	0.58 [0.51, 0.64]	3.68 [3.46, 3.91]	3.72 [3.49, 3.96]	45.16 [40.97, 49.35]

This table shows that credit claiming messages are more effective at cultivating support than advertising messages. Each row contains the conditions: the top row is the advertising condition, the middle row is the credit claiming condition, and the bottom row is the control condition. The columns contain the outcome variables. Each entry is the corresponding condition's average for the dependent variable, with a 95 percent confidence interval below this average. The first column contains a manipulation check, demonstrating that our study increases name recognition, evidence subjects received our treatments. The second and third columns demonstrate that claiming credit increased the impression that legislators were effective at delivering money to the district and passing legislation beneficial for the district. The fourth column shows that credit claiming messages cultivated more support for the legislator.

4.4 The Distinct Effects of Credit Claiming

In this brief chapter we accomplish two objectives. It provides our first evidence of how legislators credit claiming statements cultivate constituent support. Using an experiment administered in a setting where legislators communicate with constituents, we show that credit claiming messages do more than just bolster name recognition. Claiming credit for spending also cultivates an impression of influence over the expenditure process. After reading credit claiming messages, voters perceive their representative as more attentive to the district and more effective at delivering money to the district. The result is that credit claiming messages cause a larger increase in support than other non-political messages.

It also introduces our tools for measuring the effect of credit claiming statements. Throughout the book we use experiments to assess how constituents evaluate the content of legislators' credit claiming messages and how this subsequently affects support for the incumbent. The experiments also provide us with the precise control over message content, essential for testing subtle theories of how constituents allocate credit. Experiments also provide the ability to measure constituent response, providing the granular information necessary to test theories of how voters evaluate subtle differences in credit claiming statements. And by randomizing the type of messages constituents receive, experiments allows us to avoid the problems that plague observational studies of how legislators engage constituents to cultivate constituent support (Fiorina, 1981).

Credit claiming messages have an effect distinct from advertising messages. But the experiment in this chapter reveals only that there is a difference, it does not reveal how constituents respond to the content of credit claiming messages. In the next

chapter we use a series of experiments to identify how voters allocate credit. This reveals a surprising pattern in how constituents allocate credit: voters substitute an evaluation of the action that legislators report for an evaluation of the amount claimed.

Chapter 5

Cultivating an Impression of Influence with Actions and Small Expenditures

The previous chapter shows that when legislators claim credit for spending they do more than simply bolster their name recognition. They cause constituents to perceive their representative as effective at delivering money to the district and this subsequently causes an increase in overall evaluations of the legislator. This shows that credit claiming is an effective and distinct strategy for building support with constituents.

This chapter uses a series of experiments and observational data to examine how constituents allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages and to show how this affects accountability. As we argued in Chapter 2, constituents tend to evaluate messages from political officials quickly, with limited cognitive effort, and often with little broader context about the expenditure. The rapid evaluation of

content causes constituents to reward legislators for more than just spending as it occurs in the district. Constituents reward legislators for claiming credit for spending and make only slight distinctions between money that has already been secured, money that will be spent in the distant future, and spending that has only a small probability of reaching the district.

Even when constituents rapidly evaluate legislators' credit claiming statements, some information is easy to incorporate. We show that constituents are responsive to the type of expenditure that legislators claim credit for securing and who announces the expenditure. Constituents, however, are less responsive to the amount of money secured. Across several experiments we show that legislators' credit has only a loose relationship with the amount of money legislators claim credit for. Legislators receive credit for spending even if they claim credit for relatively small amounts and even if they are ambiguous about the amount delivered to the district.

While responding little to increases in money, constituents have a sustained and large response to increases in the number of credit claiming messages legislators articulate. Increasing the number of credit claiming messages causes constituents to perceive their legislator as more effective at delivering money to the district and causes them to increase their overall evaluation of their representative's performance. The result: frequent credit claiming for smaller amounts of money are more effective at cultivating support than one, much larger, expenditure.

Our evidence characterizes how legislators claim credit for spending and how constituents respond to those credit claiming efforts. The experimental variation provides internal validity—ensuring we can isolate the causal effects of our interventions. And our analysis of legislative statements shows that legislators regularly communicate

credit claiming messages. But we have yet to demonstrate legislators' statements are actually reaching constituents and affect political representation. To show that our characterization of the credit claiming, credit allocation process matters for representation, we use additional survey evidence to show that there is a relationship between legislators' credit claiming rates and constituents' evaluations of their representative. Using this observational data, we show that legislators who claim credit at higher rates are viewed as more effective at delivering money to the district and are evaluated more highly overall. This effect is particularly strong among constituents who identify with the opposite party of the representative—evidence that credit claiming cultivates a personal vote that sustains support for representatives.

One of the primary ways representation occurs around spending, then, is through legislators' statements and constituents' evaluations of those statements. As we describe in the conclusion to the chapter, this creates new complications for accountability on spending, creating potential pitfalls and new possibilities. Perhaps the potential pitfalls of the rhetoric of representation are easiest to identify and most familiar to political scientists. By rewarding legislators throughout the appropriations process, there is a risk that legislators will fail to deliver appropriations to the district. And by failing to include information about expenditures, constituents may fail to incentive legislators to provide adequate spending levels in the district. In contrast, however, there are potential positive implications. By rewarding legislators throughout the appropriations process, constituents may actually increase the effort legislators exert at delivering money to the district. And by recognizing their limited information about expenditures, constituents may ensure that their preferred projects are funded in the district and that legislators avoid engaging in wasteful spending.

This chapter presents extensive evidence characterize how representation occurs around spending—including a series of experiments and observational data. We turn now to our first experiment, which shows that legislators receive nearly equal credit for requesting or securing spending and that constituents appear to not include information about spending when evaluating legislators’ credit claiming efforts.

5.1 Study 1: Evaluating the Mere Report of an Action, Not Money Delivered

Our first experiment tests two observable implications of constituents evaluating the report of an action in a credit claiming statement, rather than the actual delivery of money to the district. First, if constituents are evaluating actions then legislators will be able to cultivate support for more than just actually securing money for the district. The appropriations process contains many points where legislators perform actions that are necessary for securing funds and could lead to money being spent in the district, even if those actions do not directly result in spending in the district. For example, prior to the 112th Congress, representatives could request that funds be earmarked for particular projects. Even with the ban on earmarks, legislators could submit letters of support or make phone calls to encourage bureaucrats to allocate grants to particular groups. If constituents allocate credit based on their evaluation of performed actions, then we expect that claiming credit for such requests will cultivate support—and perhaps as much support as actually securing the money for the district. Second, if constituents evaluate the report of the action, then explicitly stating the dollar amount should have little affect on how constituents allocate credit.

We test the observable implications with a survey experiment. We use a sample of 2,020 respondents from the Survey Sampling International (SSI) panel, census matched to be representative of the United States. For all respondents not assigned to the control condition, we randomly selected one of the respondent's two senators for our experiment. We then told the participants that we "found the most recent newspaper article covering" the randomly selected senator.

Our experiment simultaneously varied the *action* that the senator claimed credit for performing and whether the article mentioned an explicit *amount* of funds that would be secured for the project. The three action conditions vary the work that a legislator performed in procuring spending for the district. In the first action condition, the respondent's senator announced that she *secured* funds for a "local road project" and that the money *will* be spent in the district. This unambiguously informs constituents that the money has been secured and will be delivered to the district. But if constituents are evaluating the mere report of actions that could lead to expenditures, we expect that representatives will be able to cultivate support by claiming credit for actions that occur before the district actually receives funding. In the second action condition, the senator claims credit for *requesting* funds, while explaining how the funds *would be* spent if delivered to the district, leaving more uncertainty about whether the district will actually receive the money. Claiming credit for merely requesting money leaves ambiguity about whether the district will receive the money. But we expect that legislators will be able to receive credit for actions that leave even greater uncertainty about the amount of money delivered to the district and when the money will actually be allocated. If credit is allocated in response to a rapid evaluation of a message, then legislators should be able to receive

credit for merely expressing their intent to request funding for the district. We test this in the third action condition. Respondents in this condition read a news story in which their senator announces that she *will request* money for the district, again reporting how the money would be spent if secured.

We crossed the three action conditions with two *money* conditions, that vary the specificity that legislators use when describing the funding for the project. In the first money condition the exact dollar amount of funding for the project was provided—\$84 million. We set the amount of money extremely high, to bias our study against our hypotheses that the money will matter little. In the second money condition we suppressed the dollar amount, instead indicating that legislators secured/sought undefined *support* for the district.

Table 5.1: Article Content Across Conditions

<p>Headline: Senator senatorName (secured/requested/will request) [\$84 million/support] for local projects</p> <p>Body: senatorName (senatorParty - State) (secured/requested/will request) [\$84 Million/support] for local road projects through the Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. Senator senatorName said “I (am pleased to bring home/ am happy to make this request for/will submit a request for) [\$84 Million/support] from the Federal Highway Administration. It is critical that we maintain our infrastructure to ensure that our roads are safe for travelers and the efficient flow of commerce.” This funding (will/would/would) repave local roads.</p> <p>Key senatorName: Senator’s name senatorParty: Senator’s party state: Senator’s state</p> <p>Treatments Actions: (Secured/Requested/Will Request) Money: [Money/Support]</p>
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With the control condition—where we simply ask respondents about their senator—

our design constitutes a $3 \times 2 + 1$ experimental design (providing 7 conditions in total). We provide the complete intervention in Table 5.1. The content in the parentheses correspond to the action condition with the order given by (secured/request/will request) and the content in brackets is selected based on the money condition [money/support]. The article is customized for each respondent. After assigning a respondent to a condition and selecting a senator we replace each instance of |senatorName with the senator’s name, |senatorParty with the senator’s party, and |state with the state. After presenting the intervention to constituents, we asked constituents for overall evaluations of their senator (and other political officials), evaluations of the senator’s ability to benefit the district in particular areas, and evaluations of the program. We randomized question order in each block in this study and the remaining studies in this chapter.

Table 5.2 summarizes the results of our experiment across the seven conditions (rows) and five dependent variables (columns). Each entry provides the average responses of the participants in each condition, with the 95 percent confidence interval for that average. Across conditions and dependent variables, we find that credit claiming messages cultivate a senator’s impression of influence over expenditures and increases overall support. But what legislators claim credit for doing has only a slight influence over how constituents allocate credit. This is evident in the constituents’ evaluations of their senator’s ability to deliver money to the district, measured on a seven-point scale and reported in the first column. The six credit claiming conditions caused constituents to evaluate their senator as 0.27 units more effective at delivering money to the district than constituents in the control condition (95 percent confidence interval, [0.08, 0.45]). Across the credit claiming conditions, however, we

detect only slight differences in perceived effectiveness across the different conditions: constituents appear to reward legislators similarly for securing, requesting, or stating an intent to request. The largest increase in perceived effectiveness does occur for the condition where the senator *secures money* for the district, with legislators rated as 0.38 units more effective at delivering money to the district than senators in the control condition (95 percent confidence interval [0.14, 0.62]). Senators assigned to other conditions are rated as 0.24 units more effective than control senators (95 percent confidence interval [0.05, 0.43]). The difference is substantively interesting—0.14 unit difference (95 percent confidence interval [-0.04, 0.32]), but we show below that it does not subsequently cause an increase in overall thermometer evaluations.

Aside from the *secured money* condition, we find few differences in how constituents evaluate legislators' effectiveness at delivering funds to the district. Participants assigned to the condition where their senator *secured* an expenditure (averaging over whether an explicit dollar figure was discussed), increase their average evaluation of effectiveness 0.32 units (95 percent confidence interval, [0.12, 0.53]). This is similar to the increase that *requesting* and stating that the representative *will request* an expenditure causes (0.24 units, 95 percent confident interval [0.04, 0.44] ; 0.24 units 95 percent confidence interval [0.03, 0.45], respectively). And even if we collapse the *request* and *will request* conditions together (to increase our statistical power) we still fail to find a meaningful difference with the *securing* condition. *Securing* an expenditure increases the effectiveness rating only 0.09 units more than *requesting*—an increase in perceived effectiveness, but an increase we cannot distinguish from zero (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.06, 0.23]).

Explicitly stating the amount of money secured also appears to exert little in-

Table 5.2: Constituents Respond to the Mere Report of an Action, But Are Unresponsive to the Type of Action

Condition	Delivering Money	Passing Legislation	Legislator Feeling Thermometer	Approve	Likelihood of Receiving Money
Control	3.89 [3.72,4.06]	3.91 [3.74, 4.09]	45.92 [42.58, 49.26]	0.37 [0.31, 0.43]	- -
Will Request Money	4.08 [3.92, 4.25]	4.04 [3.87, 4.21]	51.78 [48.53, 55.02]	0.46 [0.40, 0.51]	0.34 [0.28, 0.39]
Will Request Support	4.17 [4.01,4.32]	4.13 [3.97, 4.29]	53.33 [50.30, 56.36]	0.55 [0.49, 0.60]	0.34 [0.29, 0.39]
Requested Money	4.11 [3.94, 4.28]	4.13 [3.96, 4.31]	49.81 [46.47, 53.15]	0.48 [0.42, 0.54]	0.33 [0.28, 0.39]
Requested Support	4.14 [3.97, 4.31]	4.16 [3.98, 4.34]	50.04 [46.65, 53.43]	0.46 [0.40, 0.52]	0.34 [0.28, 0.40]
Secured Money	4.27 [4.10, 4.43]	4.15 [3.98, 4.32]	52.23 [49.00, 55.46]	0.51 [0.45, 0.56]	0.50 [0.44, 0.55]
Secured Support	4.16 [3.99, 4.32]	4.16 [3.99, 4.33]	50.87 [47.63, 54.11]	0.44 [0.38, 0.50]	0.40 [0.35, 0.46]

This table shows how evaluation of legislators varies across conditions (rows) and dependent variables (columns). For evaluations of the legislator, constituents reward legislators similarly for requesting or securing money. This occurs, even though constituents identify differences in the likelihood their district will receive the money.

fluence over participants' evaluations. Participants assigned to the *money* condition increased their evaluation of their senator's ability to deliver money to the district 0.27 units (95 percent confidence interval [0.07, 0.46])—nearly identical to the 0.27 unit increase among participants assigned to the *support* condition (95 percent confidence interval [0.07, 0.46]). The second column of the table presents average evaluations of a legislator's ability to pass legislation beneficial to the district—another question indicative of a senator's impression of influence. Across the conditions—both the action and money conditions—we replicate the same result: constituents increase support in response to credit claiming messages, but the magnitude of this increase depends

only slightly upon what legislators claim credit for accomplishing.

The credit claiming messages not only cause an increase in perceived effectiveness, they also cause constituents to be more supportive of their senator overall. The third column presents the average feeling thermometer rating for senators across the conditions. Credit claiming increases overall evaluations—averaged across the six treatment conditions, the credit claiming statements increased the senator’s average thermometer score 5.5 points (95 percent confidence interval, [1.92, 9.10]). This increase is substantively large—it is about 25% of the increase in average thermometer score associated with having a copartisan senator in the control condition. But the size of the increase does not depend on the action reported. Claiming credit for *securing* either money or support for the district increases the thermometer rating only 0.19 points more than claiming credit for *requesting* or *intending to request* money or support, an increase in effect size that is neither substantively nor statistically significant (95 percent confidence interval, [-2.61, 2.99]). Explicitly stating the dollar amount secured also does not cause a larger increase in thermometer score. Constituents assigned to the *money* condition increase their thermometer rating of their senator 0.24 points less than constituents assigned to the *support* condition. Again this difference is neither substantively nor statistically significant (95 percent confidence interval, [-2.88 ,2.40]). This pattern is robust to the overall evaluation used: if we use senator approval as the dependent variable we find that constituents are not responsive to the action reported. In Column 4 we report the average rate participants in each condition approve of the job the selected senator is performing in Washington, measured as a dichotomous variable. Aggregated together, the six credit claiming conditions cause an 11.4 percentage point increase in the approval rate over

the control condition (95 percent confidence interval, [0.05, 17.71]). No matter how we compare responses across the action treatment conditions, we fail to detect substantively significant differences in how the content of the credit claiming messages affects the boost in approval.

Participants appear to allocate credit in response to the mere report of an action—with the type of action or explicit references to the amount of money to be delivered causing only slight differences in how constituents evaluate messages and reward legislators. The lack of distinction across conditions is all the more surprising because, when prompted, constituents identify differences in the likelihood that the money would reach the district across conditions. The final column of Table 5.2 shows the proportion of participants in each condition who answered it was likely that the district would actually receive the money.¹

The right-most column of Table 5.2 shows that participants in the *secured* condition thought they were more likely to receive the money. Legislators claiming credit for *securing* the expenditure caused an 11.3 percentage point increase in the proportion of participants who thought that the money was likely to reach the district (95 percent confidence interval [0.06, 0.17]). The increase was even larger for participants in the *secured* condition with the explicit mention of *money*. Participants in the *secured* condition and whose story explicitly discussed *money* were 9 percentage points more likely to identify the expenditure as likely to reach the district than participants in the *secured* condition but whose story only mentioned *support* (95 percent confidence interval, [0.02, 0.17]) and 16 percentage point increase over all other conditions (95 percent confidence interval, [0.10, 0.22]).

¹This question—which depends on reading a newspaper story about local road projects—would make little sense to our control condition, so we did not pose it to them.

The content of the message, therefore, systematically affects the perceived likelihood that money reaches the district. Yet, the differences in perceived likelihood do not extend to the participants' evaluations of their senator. Participants across our treatment conditions increased their overall evaluation of their representative a similar amount, regardless of what actions legislators are claiming credit for performing or how explicit legislators are about the money they have secured—evidence that constituents are evaluating and reward legislators for the mere report of an action.

The evidence thus far, however, has relied partly on our failure to detect substantively important differences across a number of treatment arms. This makes it tempting to offer less theoretically interesting explanations for our findings. One explanation is that our failure to find differences across the different actions or explicit report of money is that the participants in our online study were not engaged with their task: they read the statement as quickly as possible, much faster than actual constituents might when reading a newspaper or other news sources. The results of the experiment, however, suggest this is not the case: participants identified substantial differences across the conditions in the likelihood of the district receiving money.

Another explanation is that we simply lack the power to detect differences across our treatment conditions and that we have artificially advantaged our argument by equating it with a failure to reject null hypotheses. We are sympathetic to this alternative explanation, because it is statistically improbable that any two interventions have *exactly* the same effect. Yet, our results show that there are generally only slight differences in the credit allocated across conditions—even if we avoid relying on null hypothesis tests, we would still conclude there are few meaningful and robust

differences across credit claiming conditions.

This first study shows that legislators can cultivate support by claiming credit for securing money or merely requesting spending for the district and the credit allocated does not appear to depend on explicit reference to money. Our second study explicitly examines the role of money in credit allocation. We show that extremely large shifts in the amount of money legislators claim credit for securing have little effect on the credit constituents allocate.

5.2 Study 2: The Limited Responsiveness to the Amount Claimed

Evaluating the amount of money allocated for a project in a credit claiming message is a difficult task for constituents. The task is difficult, in part, because constituents are often quickly evaluating legislators' credit claiming messages. And when our brains work quickly we often struggle to identify and extract numerical information (Hatano and Osawa, 1983). But even if constituents were to think carefully about the amount of money for a project in a credit claiming message, they may still struggle to use it to evaluate the expenditure. Without additional expertise or information, it is often hard to know how much an expenditure will affect the budget of local organizations or the likely impact on local infrastructure. In the absence of this context, constituents may find it difficult to reward legislators for dollar amounts secured and instead choose to reward legislators simply for the project allocation (Stein and Bickers, 1994).

Even voters who are working quickly and lack context may, however, be able

to make coarse distinctions across certain kinds of spending. Familiar numerical quantities are often easily evaluated and incorporated in evaluations. For example, Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg (2013) show that survey respondents can accurately recall gas prices and unemployment rates, because respondents are used to seeing these numbers and thinking about their implications for their day-to-day life. Similar intuitive evaluations are possible when constituents are evaluating the funds that legislators use in credit claiming statements. To see how, consider an extreme and fictitious example: a legislator who claims credit for a \$5 project in the district. Constituents deal with this small amount of money every day, so without much effort they will recognize this as small amount of money and that the expenditure is essentially inconsequential. By way of comparison, suppose that the legislator claimed credit for delivering a \$1,000,000 grant to the district. Without much effort, and without calculating the actual numerical difference constituents recognize \$1,000,000 as a lot of money—and certainly recognize that it is much more useful than \$5 dollars. When dealing with amounts that constituents can quickly evaluate, legislators may receive more credit when claiming credit for money being delivered to the district. But constituents will likely struggle to intuitively reason about differences in larger, less familiar, sums of money. As a less extreme example, consider one legislator who claims credit for \$10,000,000 delivered to the district and another who claims credit for \$1,000,000. Few people regularly deal with exchanges involving \$10,000,000 or \$1,000,000. Without being able to make the direct comparison, it will require more effort for constituents to conceptualize the difference between the two amounts, making it less likely that one expenditure will be readily identified as substantially larger than another. This is true even though the difference between

\$10,000,000 and \$1,000,000 is much larger—9 times—than the difference between \$5 and \$1,000,000 (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974; Kahneman, 2011).

It is also possible for a large range of expenditures that constituents are simply unable to incorporate dollar amounts into their evaluations. This may occur because even small amounts of money claimed in press releases—which we document below—are actually much larger than the stark contrast we created in our hypothetical example. This would blunt the potential for familiarity to assist in evaluating credit claiming statements.

To test how constituents respond to the amount of money allocated for an expenditure, we designed a pair of experiments to assess how different amounts of money claimed by representatives affect constituent credit allocation. To focus attention on the credit claiming statement—and not the actual representative—in both experiments we told participants that “we have obtained a very short newspaper story about a representative, whose name we are withholding”. The participants were then presented with a newspaper story where the representative name was redacted (using a rectangular black box, as is common practice in redactions in government documents). Then using actual credit claiming statements, we created templates for credit claiming statements. In this first iteration of the design, the representative claimed credit for securing a grant to “hire and train” new police officers.

Within the template, we randomly varied the amount of money that legislators claimed credit for securing. To obtain constituents’ response over a broad range of potential dollar values, we randomly drew the amount that legislators’ claimed credit for securing from a continuous uniform distribution, with a minimum amount claimed of \$10,000 and a maximum amount claimed of \$10,000,000. We use the

uniform distribution to obtain a large spread throughout the interval and to simplify the analysis of the experiment. We provide a summary of our treatment in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Measuring Constituent Responsiveness to the Dollar Amount Claimed

Headline: Representative (redacted): ([D/R]- state) Secures amount to Expand Local Police Force
Body: Representative (redacted) ([D/R]- state) secured amount today to hire and train new police officers. The money, which is from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program, will help local police departments cope with recent budget cuts. When asked for comment, Representative (redacted) said “It is critical that we bolster our local police departments to maintain the safety of our community. I am pleased to announce amount for local law enforcement.”
<hr/>
Key
state: representative’s state
<hr/>
Treatments
Money: amount
Party: [D/R]

We administered this study using an experiment embedded in an online survey, using the sample of 2,020 respondents from the SSI online panel we used in Section 5.1. Each respondent completed Study 1 in this chapter and then was given the prompt for this study. This creates the possibility that the intervention in our first round may affect the treatment in the second round. But analyses show that there is little relationship between the respondent’s condition in our first study and how they responded to this study.² After providing respondents with the newspaper article, we asked the respondents about their overall assessments of the legislator.

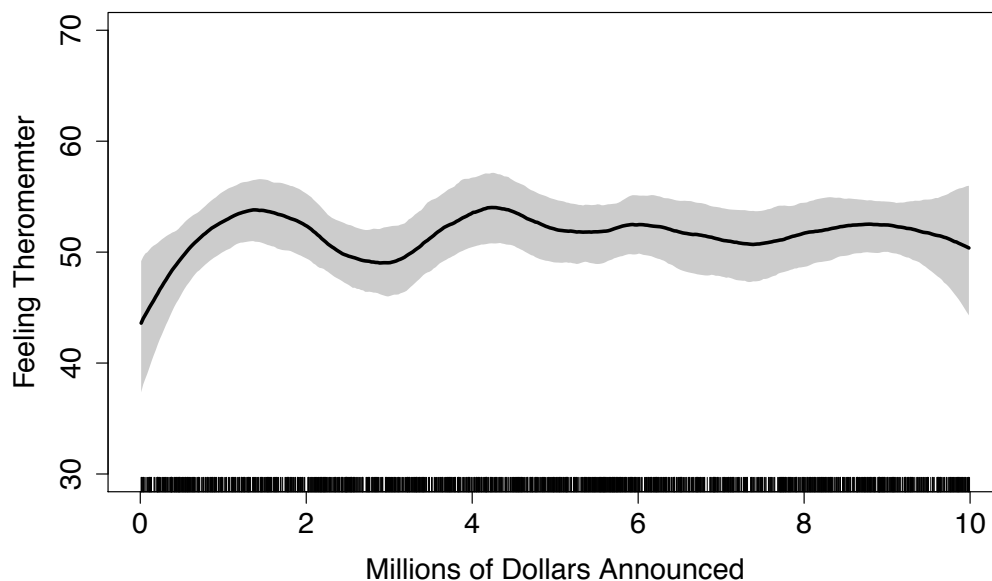
²The random assignment of whether the respondent saw an explicit dollar figure in the first condition is particularly useful, because it allows us to check for anchoring effects (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). An anchoring effect would occur if the large amount in the first study created an artificial baseline that our participants used to assess expenditures in this study. We find little evidence that seeing the much larger expenditure in the first experiment affects how constituents allocate credit in this intervention. As this implies, we replicate our results if we condition on respondents’ condition in our first experiment.

Our goal is to estimate a curve that summarizes how varying amounts of money cultivate support for legislators. To estimate this curve we use a flexible non-parametric regression (Cleveland, 1979). The use of the non-parametric regression ensures that we have enough information to discover how constituents allocate credit, without failing to discover systematic differences across the dollar amounts because we lack statistical power. To do this, non-parametric regression borrows information about the responses from constituents who were assigned similar dollar amounts. We determine the amount of smoothing using ten-fold cross validation, choosing the total smoothing to minimize the mean square error, a measure that balances bias—how much we borrow across amounts claimed—and variance—how much uncertainty we have for our estimates.

Figure 5.1 shows how constituents allocate credit in response to their representative. The plot shows the overall relationship between the feeling thermometer assessment of the redacted legislator (vertical axis) and how many millions of dollars were claimed in the grant announcement (horizontal axis), averaging over whether the representative was identified as a Republican or a Democrat. The black line is the conditional mean, determined using the non-parametric regression and gray bands are a 95 percent confidence interval, which we determined using bootstrapping.

In this iteration of the experiment it appears that constituents are responsive to the amount claimed, but as we see this response is relatively small and we fail to find this increase in the second iteration of this experiment. The lowest level of support for the legislator, an average thermometer ranking of 43.2, occurs at the smallest amount claimed to help hire and train police officers— a mere \$10,000, hardly enough to provide partial training for one police officer (95 percent confidence

Figure 5.1: Massive Increases in Expenditures Cause Only a Small Increase in Support



This figure shows how average feeling thermometer ratings increase in response to the amount of money claimed (in millions of dollars). The expected curve is shown with the dark black line and 95 percent confidence intervals are shown in lighter grey. Participants—particularly opposing partisans—are initially responsive to the amount claimed. But for very large increases, there is little response to the dollar amount claimed.

interval for the average, [37.3, 48.6]). As the amount secured increases over this low baseline, participants raise their evaluation of the representative. A local maximum of support occurs around \$1.4 million dollars, with the average evaluation rising to 53.7 (95 percent confidence interval, [50.9, 56.5]).

As the funds are increased substantially, however, there is no additional increase in support for the representative—constituents do not provide additional rewards to legislators for additional money secured. From \$1.4 million to \$10 million dollars claimed, evaluations are essentially unchanged, even with a large increase in expen-

diture. This \$8.6 million increase causes only a 0.9 point increase in average feeling thermometer rating, a change that is neither statistically nor substantively significant (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.4, 0.6]).

This experiment shows that constituents are responsive to small increases in funding when allocating credit, but then do not provide additional credit for larger increases in the amount secured. Of course, there are a number of potential alternative explanations that could explain constituents' limited responsiveness to spending. Perhaps the limited response was due to the funding recipient—local police. It could be that constituents are more responsive to other spending sources. Our next study eliminates this possibility, demonstrating that local police tend to be a popular recipient of spending. Or perhaps the spending levels caused both positive and negative evaluations. Some constituents may have perceived relatively small expenditures as insufficient to help local police and lowered their evaluation of the representative for securing such a small amount of money. At the other extreme, constituents may have perceived the large expenditures as wasteful, dampening support for the representative.

To address these and other potential concerns we conducted our dose-response study a second time, on a new set of respondents. In this second instance, we again described how a representative secured money, while redacting the legislators' name. But now we used a template describing how money was secured for a local transportation project, again varying the amount claimed in the press release continuously. To provide the most power to measure constituents' responsiveness, we focused on the dollar range where constituents were the most responsive in the previous experiment: the amount claimed was drawn from a continuous uniform distribution, with a mini-

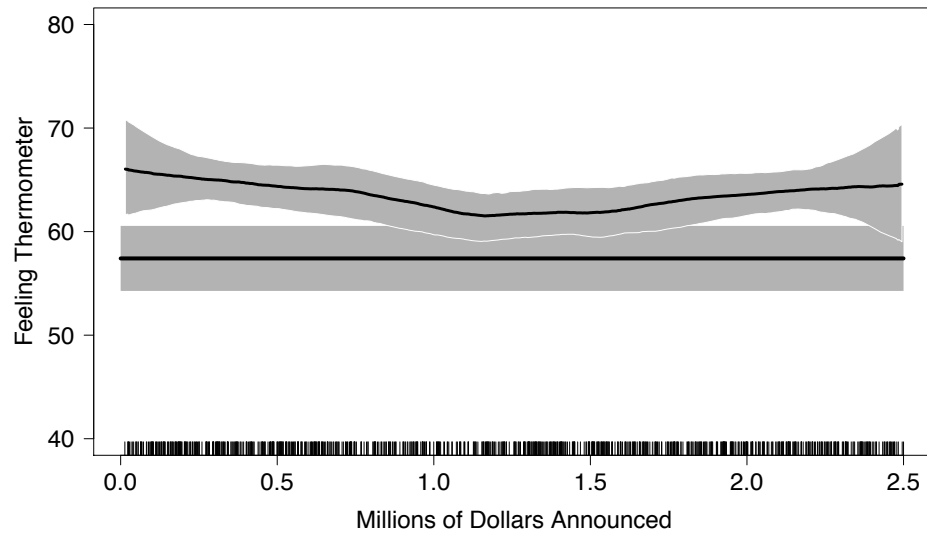
imum dollar amount of \$10,000 and a maximum dollar amount of \$2.5 million. And to determine if legislators were being punished for providing too little money or too much money, we compared the effect of the credit claiming message to an *advertising* statement. We replicated a message from Chapter 4, providing information about a fictitious district resident who won an art contest. Table 5.4 summarizes our treatments.

We recruited 1,000 participants using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk and randomized the participants to conditions in two stages. In the first stage, we randomly assigned participants to receive either the advertising condition (with a 10% chance) or credit claiming condition (with a 90% chance). If a participant was assigned to the credit claiming condition, we then randomly generated the amount.

In this iteration of the experiment constituents were less responsive to the amount of money legislators’ secured—indicative of the limited effect of increasing spending on legislators’ impression of influence. Figure 5.2 shows that the participants’ evaluations of the representative were not responsive to the dollar amount claimed. As in Figure 5.1, we examine how the representative’s feeling thermometer ratings (vertical axis) change as the amount claimed changes (horizontal axis). The thick line is a non-parametric regression line, the gray-bands are 95 percent confidence envelopes.

Figure 5.2 shows that constituents are generally unresponsive to the dollar amount claimed in our study. Indeed, increasing the dollar amount claimed appears to *lower* support for the legislator—though the amount lowered is neither substantively nor statistically significant. This shows that participants are generally unresponsive to increases in the dollar amount claimed across the entire range of spending. It would appear that the limited responsiveness detected with the police force manipulation

Figure 5.2: The Limited Responsiveness to Increases in Dollar Amount



This figure shows constituents' limited response to increases in the dollar amount claimed. In general, constituents fail to alter their evaluation of the legislator as the amount claimed increases. But, the credit claiming condition does boost support substantially over the advertising condition. Credit claiming messages boost support, but the amount claimed appears to matter little.

Table 5.4: Measuring Constituent Responsiveness to Dollar Amounts and Comparing to Advertising Condition

Credit Claiming Condition	Advertising Condition
<p>Headline: Representative (redacted) Secures amount for Local Road Projects.</p> <p>Body: Representative (redacted) secured amount for local road projects through the Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. Representative (redacted) said “I am pleased to secure amount from the Federal Highway Administration. It is critical that we maintain our infrastructure to ensure that our roads are safe for travelers and the efficient flow of commerce.” The funding will repave local roads.</p>	<p>Headline: Representative (redacted) announces Local Wins Congressional Art Contest</p> <p>Body: Rep. (redacted) announced that 17-year old Sara Fischer won 1st place in the annual Congressional district art competition. Sara’s winning art, “Medals?” was created using colored pencils. Rep. (redacted) said Sara’s artwork will be displayed in the US Capitol with other winning entries from districts nationwide.</p>
<p>Treatments</p> <p>Type of Message: Credit Claiming (left-column), Advertising (right-column)</p> <p>Amount: amount</p>	

was not an artifact of the type of expenditure. Even when presented with highway expenditures, constituents are generally unresponsive to the dollar amount claimed. In Study 3 and Study 4 in this chapter we again replicate this result in different contexts.

But constituents are responsive to the credit claiming message. Participants in the credit claiming condition had a substantially higher evaluation of the representative than participants in the advertising condition—replicating our finding from Chapter 4 and providing further evidence of the distinct effects of credit claiming messages on legislators’ impression of influence. The thick horizontal line in Figure

5.2 is the average feeling thermometer evaluation for participants in the advertising condition, which is below the average feeling thermometer evaluation in the credit claiming condition for the entire range of dollar amounts. Overall, constituents who read the credit claiming message evaluated the representative 6.1 points higher than participants who read the advertising condition (95 percent confidence interval, [2.8, 9.5]). And this difference is just as high for participants who saw only a relatively small amount of money and large amount of money. Participants who saw a credit claiming message for less than \$500,000 rated their representative 7.6 points higher than the credit claiming message, while participants who saw a credit claiming message for more than \$2 million evaluated 5.7 points higher. It does not appear, then, that participants are punishing representatives for delivering too little money or for being wasteful with large expenditures. Rather, it appears that participants are rewarding legislators for working to deliver money to the district and not conditioning the evaluations on the size of the project.

The lack of responsiveness across the dollar amount secured—and the increase over the advertising condition—provides indirect evidence that constituents are not assessing the size or wastefulness of an expenditure. For more direct evidence we asked participants to evaluate the expenditure and whether it was wasteful or likely to make a difference in the district. And in both cases, it appears that the amount claimed has only a small effect on constituent evaluations. Consider the question about wasteful spending. Overall, relatively few respondents identified the road project as wasteful—only 14.9% of respondents. And being assigned a press release that claimed credit for more money lead to only a small increase in the perceived wastefulness of the spending. Fitting a simple linear regression to the data, a million dollar increase

in amount claimed only caused a 1.9 percentage point increase in perceptions of wastefulness—a small overall increase (95 percent confidence interval [-0.01, 0.05]). Likewise, small expenditures did little to affect perceptions that the spending would accomplish little for the district. Overall, 72.8% of respondents agreed the spending would make a difference in the district. Increasing the amount claimed by a million dollars boosted this perception only 2.6 percentage points—again a relatively small amount (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.01, 0.07]).

Our pair of dose response experiments show that constituents are only weakly responsive to increases in the dollar amount claimed, if at all. This appears to be because constituents reward legislators for expenditure projects, but do not condition the size of the reward on the amount spent in the district. As the next experiment demonstrates, however, other information is much easier for constituents to include in their evaluations of legislators' credit claiming messages.

5.3 Study 3: Constituents Evaluate Qualitative Information, Less Responsive to Quantitative Information

Our experiments have varied two salient features of the credit claiming message: the stage in the allocation process and the amount of money allocated for the project. There are many other salient features of legislators' credit claiming messages that vary across messages that may affect the credit legislators receive. For example, the type of expenditure may affect the credit constituents allocate. This is particularly true because constituents are able to easily identify the type of expenditure and may

have sufficient context to know whether they approve or disapprove of the expenditure. Who announces the spending may also affect the credit constituents allocate legislators. Constituents, for example, may be more willing to internalize messages from copartisan legislators (Zaller, 1992). And legislators often announce spending together, which may affect how constituents allocate credit (Shepsle et al., 2009; Chen, 2010).

Rather than run several experiments that vary each of the features individually, for this study we designed an experiment that simultaneously varies many features of the message. By simultaneously varying several features of the message we can isolate the main effects of interest and determine the information constituents use to allocate credit. We also vary legislators' characteristics, to see how who is announcing an expenditure affects how constituents allocate credit. To do this, our design again makes use of a hypothetical legislator whose name has been redacted.

Using the redacted legislator, we vary five pieces of information about the credit claiming message: the recipient of the expenditure, the amount of money secured, the stage in the appropriations process, the legislator's partisanship, and who the legislator announced the expenditure with. Specifically, we use the template in Table 5.5 to construct a message that randomly selects from the following components to construct a coherent credit claiming message:

- Recipient (6): Planned Parenthood, local parks, local gun range, a fire department, a police station, or local roads
- Money (2): \$50 Thousand or \$20 Million
- Stage (3) : will request, requested, or secured

- Party (2): Democrat, Republican
- Collaboration (3): alone, with a Senate Democrat, with a Senate Republican

We compare the effect of the credit claiming message to a control condition, where the fictitious legislator sends an advertising message—announcing a constituent who won a Congressional art contest. We examine the effect of legislators’ credit claiming efforts on constituents’ propensity to *approve* of the representative’s performance in office. Specifically, we ask our participants if they “approve or disapprove” of the way the fictitious representative “is performing (his/her) job in Congress”. We use the dichotomous response to examine how the content of a legislator’s credit claiming messages affects constituent credit allocation.

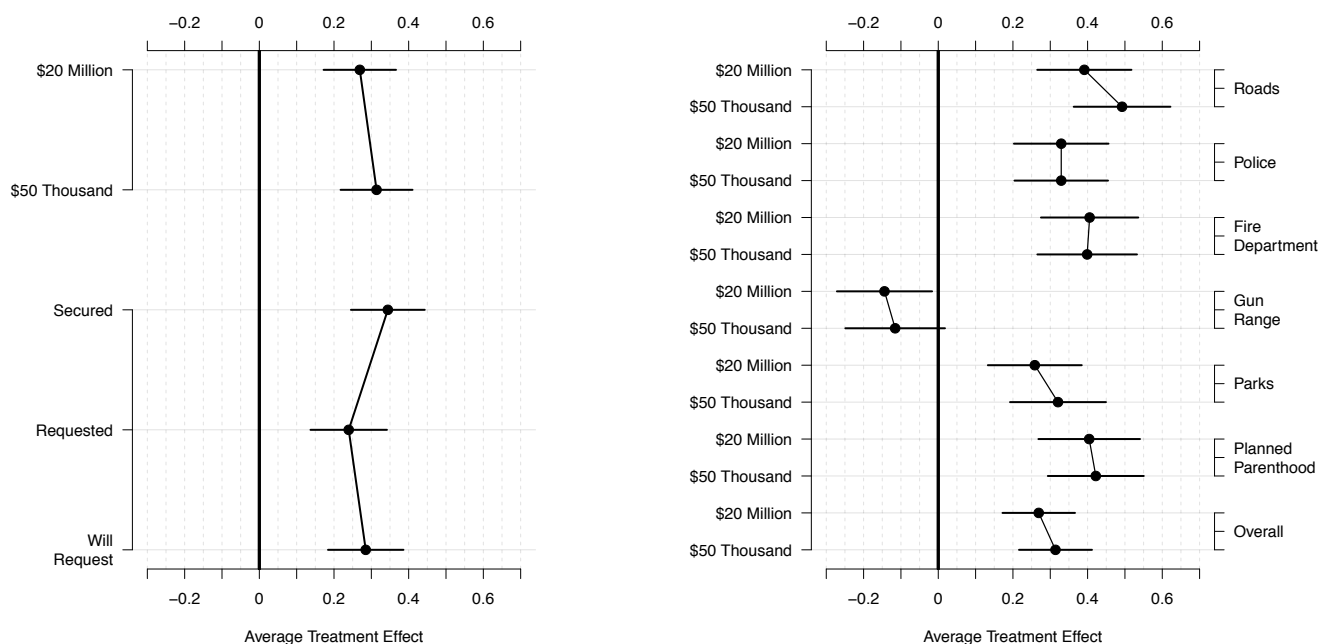
To administer the study we recruited 1,074 participants using Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk service, restricting focus to workers in the United States. We included attention checks to ensure that our workers were not satisficing (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz, 2012). After respondents were assigned to a treatment and it was administered, they completed a brief survey that asked about respondents about their evaluation of the legislator and then respondents’ political preferences. This includes each respondent’s partisan identification and political ideology—which we will use to assess the response to the type of expenditure and who announces the credit claiming activity.

Figure 5.3 shows that this experiment replicates findings from the previous two studies: respondents allocate credit for spending throughout the appropriations process and are largely unresponsive to the amount of money claimed for the project. The left-hand plot shows the marginal effects for the *stage* and *money* conditions: the increase each condition causes over the control condition, averaging over the other conditions. The points are estimates for the marginal effects and the horizontal lines

Table 5.5: Examining the Effects of Credit Claiming Statements on Constituent Credit Allocation

Advertising Condition
<p>Headline: Representative (redacted) announces annual Congressional district art competition winner</p> <p>Body: Representative (redacted) announced that 17-year old Sara Fischer won 1st place in the annual Congressional district art competition. Sara’s winning art, “Medals” was created using colored pencils. Rep. (redacted) said Sara’s artwork will be displayed in the U.S. Capitol with other winning entries from districts nationwide.</p>
Credit Claiming Condition
<p>Headline: Representative (redacted) stageTitle moneyTitle typeTitle</p> <p>Body: Representative (redacted), partyMain, alongMain stageMain moneyMain typeMain.</p> <p>Rep. (redacted) said “This money stageQuote typeQuote”</p> <hr/> <p> stageTitle:[will request/requested/secured]</p> <p> moneyTitle:[\$50 thousand/\$20 million]</p> <p> typeTitle : [to purchase safety equipment for local firefighters/to purchase safety equipment for local police/to repave local roads, to beautify local parks/for medical equipment at the local planned parenthood/to help build a state of the art gun range]</p> <p> partyMain : [Democrat/Republican]</p> <p> alongMain : [(No text)/and Senator (redacted), a Democrat/ and Senator (redacted), a Republican]</p> <p> stageMain : [will request/requested/secured]</p> <p> moneyMain: [\$50 thousand/ \$20 million]</p> <p> typeMain: [to purchase safety equipment for local firefighters/to purchase safety equipment for local police/to repave local roads, to beautify local parks/for medical equipment at the local planned parenthood/to help build a state of the art gun range]</p> <p> stageQuote : [would help/would help/will help]</p> <p> typeQuote: [our brave firefighters stay safe as they protect our businesses and homes/our brave police officers stay safe as they protect our property from criminals/keep our roads in safe and working condition, ensuring that our local economy will continue to grow/create parks that add value to the community and provide our children a safe place to play/provide state of the art care for women in our community”/”provide local residents and local, state, and national law enforcement officials a place to sharpen their skills”]</p> <hr/> <p>Summary of Conditions</p> <p>Recipient:Planned Parenthood, Parks, Gun Range, Fire Department, Police, Roads</p> <p>Money: \$ 50 thousand, \$20 million</p> <p>Stage : Will Requested, Requested, Secured</p> <p>Collaboration: Alone, a Senate Democrat, a Senate Republican</p> <p>Party: Democrat, Republican</p>

Figure 5.3: Constituents allocate Credit Throughout the Appropriations Process and Are Unresponsive to Money



This figure shows that this study replicates our findings from the previous two studies. Constituents allocate credit for spending throughout the appropriations process and struggle to reward legislators for more money delivered to the district.

are 95 percent confidence intervals. The lines connecting the points indicate how the effects vary across the conditions.

The bottom three lines show that legislators can claim credit for spending throughout the appropriations process. Stating an intention to request an expenditure increases approval ratings 28.5 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval, [0.18, 0.39]), a slightly larger increase than requesting an expenditure causes (95 percent confidence interval [0.14, 0.34]). And again, legislators receive a slightly larger increase when they claim credit for securing money for their district—a 34.4 percentage point increase in approval rating (95 percent confidence interval, [0.25, 0.44]).

Constituents also reward legislators similarly for claiming credit for large and small expenditures. Claiming credit for a \$50 thousand project causes a 31.4 percentage point increase in approval rating (95 percent confidence interval [0.22, 0.41]), a slightly larger increase than claiming credit for a \$20 million dollar project, which causes a 26.9 percentage point increase in approval ratings (95 percent confidence interval [0.17, 0.37]). While this shows that constituents are unresponsive to the dollar amount claimed, a concern that we raised in Study 2 is that the effect of money on credit allocation is conditional on the type of project. To test this alternative explanation, the right-hand plot in Figure 5.3 shows the effect of claiming credit for relatively \$50 thousand and \$20 million (labeled on the left-hand axis) for the six different types of projects and the overall relationship (right-hand axis). While there are differences across the types of projects—a point we explore in a moment—there are few differences in credit allocated for different levels of spending for the same project. It would appear, then, that there is little evidence that constituents are responsive to the dollar amounts claimed.

While constituents have limited response to money, they are more responsive to information they can easily extract and evaluate from the messages: the recipient of the expenditure and who is claiming credit for the project. To assess how constituents respond to the recipient of the expenditure (or type of expenditure), we condition on political ideology, because we expect liberals and conservatives to have very different reactions to legislators claiming credit for Planned Parenthood and gun range projects. Liberal elites and Democrats tend to vigorously defend Planned Parenthood, providing cues to like minded citizens that the organization provides valuable services. In contrast, conservatives and Republicans oppose Planned Parenthood,

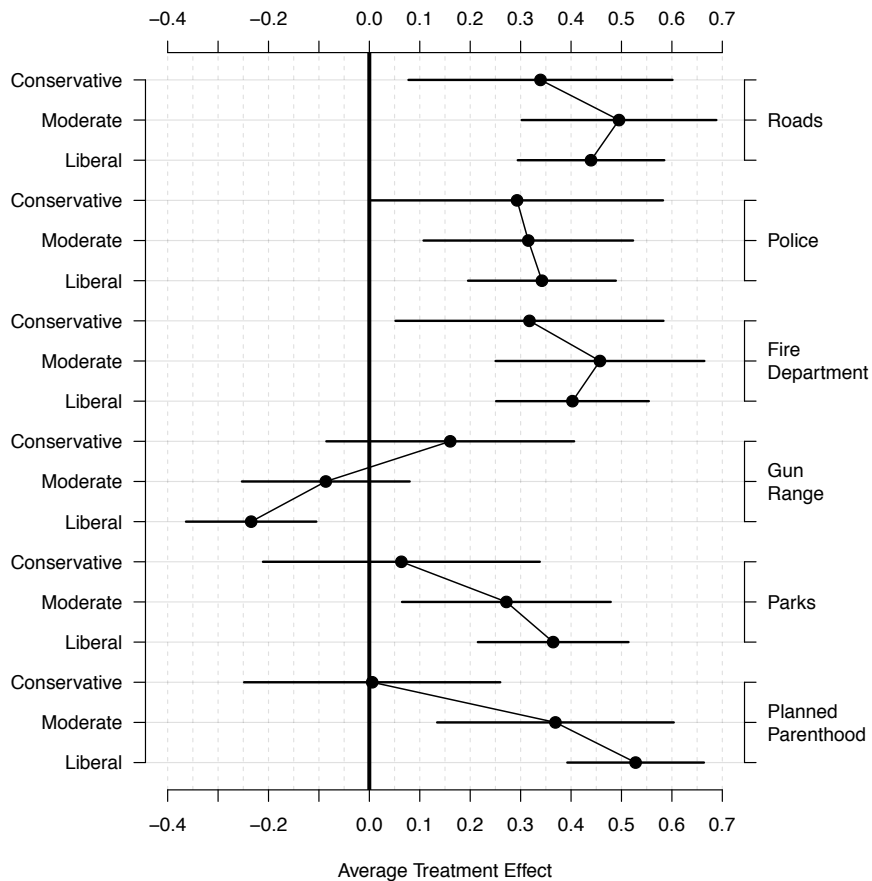
often working to strip the organization of money (For example, see Kasperowicz 2013). Very different cues are available about gun ranges and guns more generally. Many Democrats—particularly liberal-urban Democrats—have argued for increased gun regulation. Republicans and conservatives have argued vigorously for constitutional protection of guns and the party has aligned closely with the NRA to rebut attempts to regulate guns as violations of the second amendment.

If constituents use information about the type of expenditure when allocating credit, we expect that the marginal effect of claiming credit for the projects will depend on the respondent's ideology. To test this, we estimate conditional marginal treatment effects for the credit claiming statements, conditional on the respondent's ideology. Figure 5.4 shows the conditional marginal treatment effect for conservative, moderate, and liberal constituents (left-hand axis) for each of the six types of funding (right-hand axis).

The variation in Figure 5.4 shows constituents are responsive to the type of project in the credit claiming messages. Consider the response to money for Planned Parenthood. Liberals have a strong and positive response to funding for Planned Parenthood: claiming credit for money directed towards Planned Parenthood increases the fictitious legislator's approval rating 52.8 percentage points among liberals (95 percent confidence interval [0.40, 0.66]). In fact, Planned Parenthood causes the largest increase in approval rating for liberal respondents.

Conservative respondents, however, are essentially unresponsive to legislator's claiming credit for planned parenthood—and much less responsive to spending on Planned Parenthood than liberals. Conservative respondents increase their approval rating of the legislator only 0.5 percentage points over the control condition, an in-

Figure 5.4: Constituents are Responsive to the Type of Project Allocated



This figure shows that constituents are highly responsive to the type of project legislators claim credit for securing. Liberals reward legislators for claiming credit for projects that help planned parenthood, while punishing legislators who claim credit for a gun range. Conservatives, in contrast, are unresponsive to legislators who claim credit for planned parenthood, but reward legislators who claim credit for a gun range.

crease that is substantively small and statistically indistinguishable from zero (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.27, 0.28]). The lack of response is indicative of conservatives having a much more negative response to the Planned Parenthood funding. The approval rate among the control condition is very low—only about 30%—so conservatives remain unhappy with the legislator who claims credit for spending. And Planned Parenthood causes the smallest change in legislator approval rating among conservatives

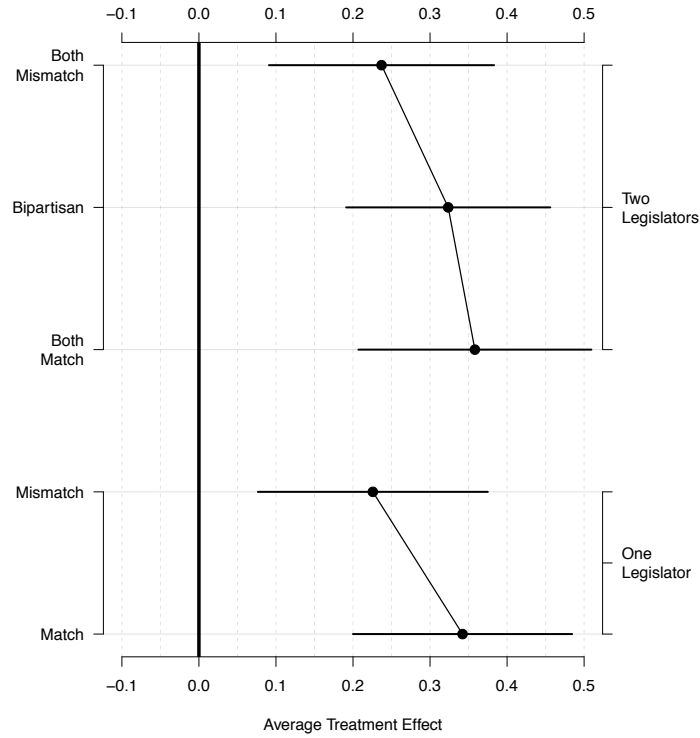
Claiming credit for gun ranges has a strikingly different effect on legislators' approval ratings. Liberal respondents punish legislators: claiming credit for money to be spent on a gun range causes a 23.4 percentage point decrease in legislators' approval rating among liberals (95 percent confident interval, [-0.35, -0.12]). Conservative constituents, however, reward legislators when they claim credit for spending allocated to gun ranges. Claiming credit for a gun range causes a 16 percentage point increase in approval rating among conservatives (95 percent confidence interval [-0.15, 0.47]), a significantly more positive response than the moderate or liberal response to the gun range—though we fail to reject the null that the increase in approval among conservative respondents is different than zero.

On other expenditures there is more agreement across ideological types. Liberals, conservatives, and moderates all reward legislators for claiming credit for money directed to fire departments, police departments, and road projects. And moderates and liberals reward legislators for parks in the district.³

Constituents also condition on who is announcing an expenditure when deciding

³There is similar heterogeneity if we condition on partisan identification, instead of ideology. The heterogeneity is even more pronounced in the expected direction if we condition on both ideology and partisanship, which we do using a new model to estimate heterogeneous treatment effects (Grimmer, Messing and Westwood, 2013).

Figure 5.5: Constituents Allocate Credit to Opposing Partisans, But Reward Copartisans More



Partisans differ in the credit they allocate legislators. Opposing partisans reward legislators for spending, copartisans are more responsive to credit claiming messages.

how to allocate credit. The legislator’s (or legislators’) party is one of the strongest pieces of information. A burgeoning literature shows that constituents tend to have an automatic response to partisan information: with a more favorable orientation to copartisans and more negative towards opposing partisans (Iyengar and Westwood, 2013). Because we randomly assign our fictitious legislator’s party—as well as any collaborator’s party—we are able to assess how constituents use party labels in their credit allocation.

Figure 5.5 shows that constituents incorporate information about the legislator’s partisanship. The bottom two lines show that partisans are more responsive to credit

claiming messages from their copartisans. A credit claiming message from an opposing partisan causes a 22.6 percentage point boost in approval rating (95 percent confidence interval [0.08, 0.37]), while a credit claiming message from a copartisan causes a 34.2 percentage point increase (95 percent confidence interval [0.20, 0.48]): an 11.6 percentage point difference in effect. Partisans also rewarded copartisans more when legislators collaborated on announcing a new expenditure. If the representative and senator who announce the grant are from a different party than the respondent the credit claiming effort causes a 25 percentage point increase in the representative's approval rating (95 percent confidence interval, [0.13, 0.37]), but if the representative and senator are from the same party as the respondent the credit claiming message causes a 37.1 percentage point increase in the representative's approval rating (95 percent confidence interval [0.24, 0.50]).⁴

Constituents, then, are responsive to qualitative information about the expenditures legislators claim credit for securing. Constituents evaluate characteristics of the expenditure—who will receive the money—and characteristics of the legislators who are announcing the expenditure. This creates incentives for legislators to care more about the type of expenditure they claim credit for securing, rather than the amount secured. The next section provides one more examination of what constituents reward—demonstrating that constituents are responsive to increases in the number of credit claiming messages legislators send.⁵

⁴While we avoid focusing on statistical significance and the rather blunt measure of rejecting null hypotheses, we note that both effects of copartisans are not significant if we set a rejection threshold of 0.05. The p-values associated with a null hypothesis test of no difference between the effect sizes is 0.091 and 0.0973 respectively.

⁵One might interpret this result as contradicting our argument why marginal legislators allocate more effort to credit claiming. This experimental result does not contradict it because our argument is about the relative efficiency of claiming credit for spending or articulating positions. Marginal legislators risk alienating opposing partisans if they articulate positions, while aligned legislators

5.4 Study 4: Frequent Messages Cultivate More Support than Large Expenditures

Through a series of studies we have shown how constituents allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages—demonstrating that constituents appear to reward legislators for reporting an action—even if spending is small or unlikely to happen for some time. Constituents do condition their evaluations on qualitative information about the project—evaluating the type of expenditure and who is claiming credit. But constituents are largely unresponsive to where a potential expenditure is in the appropriations process or to the size of the project. This occurs, we argue, because constituents tend to seize on information easily available when evaluating credit claiming messages.

In this final experiment for the chapter, we show that constituents are more responsive to increases in the number of messages sent than in the dollar amount claimed. Multiple messages provide the opportunity for constituents to repeatedly update their impression of how effective legislators are at delivering money to the district (Lodge, McGraw and Stroh, 1989). But we show that claiming credit for more spending across messages does not increase support—both because constituents lack the context to evaluate different levels of spending and because constituents forget the amount of money claimed at different rates.

The expectation that multiple messages will cultivate support with constituents is grounded both in a robust literature in marketing and political science. In marketing, scholars have shown that repeated advertisements are effective at raising brand salience and increasing the likelihood consumers purchase a product (Berlyne, 1970;

risk not building greater support with co-partisans if they focus on credit claiming.

Kirmani, 1997; Campbell and Keller, 2003). In political science, Stein and Bickers (1994) argue that constituents—particularly knowledgeable constituents—will be responsive to the award of a grant in the district, rather than the amount allocated. Stein and Bickers (1994) argue that legislators may prefer several small projects, because the act of announcing may be important than the size of the expenditure. Yet, the empirical test in Stein and Bickers (1994) differs from the argument that constituents are responsive to the number of awards. Instead, Stein and Bickers (1994) test the change in the proportion of grants that are new in the district. That constituents are responsive to the increase in this ratio is still interesting, but if constituents struggle to identify the amount awarded for a project, it stands to reason they will also struggle to classify an award as new or a carry over from a prior award. It remains to be demonstrated that constituents are more responsive to the number of credit claiming statements—even if not explicitly about a new project—rather than the amount claimed.

Testing whether constituents are more responsive to the number of messages sent than the amount claimed using standard experiment tools, though, is difficult. Varying the number of messages sent in a single survey would be challenging to make realistic and to maintain respondents' attention. Delivering several credit claiming messages of standard length in one experiment might cause our respondents to disengage with our survey or begin satisficing, which would make measurement of the effects of multiple messages difficult. And most survey companies prevent contacting respondents on subsequent days, or make the repeated contact in a panel study extremely costly.

Given the limitations of surveys, we conduct this study in a different and per-

haps more ecologically valid setting—sending messages by email (Nickerson, 2007). Email as a method of delivery has a number of distinct features that compliment the strengths of our previous survey experiments. Delivering treatments via email ensures that we can regularly contact our participants without exorbitant costs. Using emails also allows us to separate the delivery of our treatment from the measurement of the effect. This ensures that we measure more than ephemeral, short lived effects. Also the delivery of our treatment through emails ensures that our treatments have ecological validity that is difficult to replicate in our survey experiment. Representatives deliver e-newsletters to constituents in this format and the e-newsletters often contain credit claiming statements.

Using emails to deliver the treatment, we exploit an experimental design that allows us to compare the effect of increasing the dollar amount claimed to the effect of increasing the number of credit claiming messages sent. To do this, we use a 2×2 experimental design—which we summarize in Table 5.6. The first condition varies the *frequency* of messages sent. Subjects assigned to the *five message* condition received emails for five consecutive days, while subjects assigned to the *single message* condition received a single email. The second condition varied the amount claimed across the emails. Subjects assigned to the *large award* condition receive emails claiming credit for *one-hundred times* the amount of the corresponding *small award* condition with the same frequency. Table 5.7 provides an example of this manipulation, before it is rendered and sent in an email. Again, we use information about the subject’s legislator to customize the announcement to create the appearance it is from the legislator. Depending on the condition, we substitute the dollar amount at each instance of |amount.

Table 5.6: Total Amount Claimed Across Experiment Conditions

	Small Award	Large Award
Single Message	\$15,000	\$1,500,000
Five Messages	Day 1: \$15,000	Day 1: \$1,500,000
	Day 2: \$19,000	Day 2: \$1,900,000
	Day 3: \$85,000	Day 3: \$8,500,000
	Day 4: \$21,000	Day 4: \$2,100,000
	Day 5: \$36,000	Day 5: \$3,600,000
	Total: \$176,000	Total: \$17,600,000

Table 5.7: Example Credit Claiming Manipulation

<p>Headline: Representative lastName (party, state- district) Brings Local Fire Departments amount for Firefighter Safety</p> <p>Full text: A total of amount in grants for operations and safety programs was awarded to local fire departments from the Department of Homeland Security, Rep. lastName announced.</p> <p> firstName lastName (party, state- district) announced the grants today. Specifically, the grant will be used to improve training, equipment, and make modifications to fire stations and facilities in local fire departments.</p> <p>“This is great news for our local community,” said Representative lastName. “With these funds, our local fire departments will continue to train and operate with the latest in firefighter technology.”</p>
<p>Key</p> <p> lastName: The representative’s last name</p> <p> firstName: The representative’s first name</p> <p> party: The representative’s party</p> <p> state: The representative’s state</p> <p> district: The representative’s district</p> <p> amount : The dollar amount claimed</p>

We used Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk to recruit a new group of 1,001 participants for the study. To limit demand effects and to enhance the realism of our study, we created a cover story for our Mechanical Turk solicitation. We told the partici-

pants that we were researchers at Stanford University working on an application to facilitate connections between legislators and constituents. To ensure comparability across conditions, we followed a similar timeline on the delivery of the pre- and post-treatment surveys. The day after enrolling, subjects began receiving emails with the corresponding treatments. The day after the final email was sent subjects received an invitation to complete the post-experiment survey. This ensures that our findings are not the result of effects decaying after subjects participated in our study.

Given the use of emails to deliver the credit claiming messages, one concern is that our messages would be trapped in email spam filters. The construction of the emails minimized this possibility, but we use a manipulation check to demonstrate that participants received our messages, while also replicating the increase in name recognition for participants in credit claiming condition we identified in Chapter 4. The first column in Table 5.8 shows the proportion of subjects in each condition who are able to correctly identify their representative in a multiple choice test. The top entry in each row is the proportion of subjects assigned to each condition who correctly identified their representative and the 95 percent confidence interval is the bottom entry in each row. The first column of Table 5.8 shows that, across the four conditions, there is an extremely high level of recognition. And as expected intuitively, there is a slight increase among the high frequency conditions: 95.2% of the subjects assigned to the high frequency condition could correctly identify their representative, a 4.4 percentage point increase over the low frequency condition (95% confidence interval [0.01, 0.08]).

Figure 5.6 shows that increasing the number of messages cultivates more support than increasing the amount claimed. Consider the left-hand plot, which shows

Table 5.8: Number of Messages Dominates the Amount Claimed

Condition	Identify Name	Passing District Legislation
Five Messages \$17.6 Million	0.96 [0.92,0.99]	4.86 [4.67,5.06]
Single Message \$1.5 Million	0.92 [0.89,0.95]	4.43 [4.25,4.6]
Five Messages \$176,000	0.95 [0.91,0.98]	4.72 [4.53,4.92]
Single Message \$15,000	0.90 [0.87,0.93]	4.24 [4.06,4.42]

This table shows that subjects received our email messages and that increasing the number of messages bolstered one measure of a legislative effectiveness more than increasing the amount claimed. The four conditions are placed along the rows and each entry is the corresponding condition's average for the dependent variable, with a 95 percent confidence interval beneath. The first column shows that there is a high level of recognition across our conditions, evidence that subjects received our emails. The second column shows that small award, high frequency subjects evaluated their legislator as more effective at passing legislation for the district, than the large award, low frequency condition.

participants' rating of their representative's effectiveness at delivering money to the district, recorded on the same seven-point scale we use in previous sections. Each dot represents legislators' average effectiveness ratings for each condition and the lines are 95 percent confidence intervals.

The results replicate our findings from our previous studies: small increases in the amount of money claimed do cause an increase in support for representatives. Participants in the single message, large award condition—where \$1.5 million was claimed—rated their representative 0.33 units higher than participants in the single message, small award condition (95 percent confidence interval, [0.12, 0.55]).

The increase in support in response to numerous credit claiming messages, however, dwarfs the increase that occurs after claiming credit for more money. Subjects assigned to the small award, five message condition evaluated their representative

as 0.41 units more effective at delivering funds than the large award, single message condition (95% confidence interval [0.18, 0.64]). This is particularly surprising given the discrepancy in the amount claimed: subjects assigned to the small award, five message condition received messages claiming credit for about *one-tenth* of the funds as subjects in the large award, single message condition. The top estimate shows that subjects assigned to the large award, five message condition had the highest evaluation of their representative's effectiveness: increasing the evaluation 0.22 units over the small award, five message condition (95% confidence interval [-0.01, 0.44]). This increase, however, is small relative to the increase in funds claimed in the large award, five message condition. In this condition subjects received messages from legislators claiming credit for *one-hundred times* the money as the amount claimed in the small award, five message condition.

This pattern—constituents responding more to the number of actions, rather than the amount claimed—is replicated when participants were asked to assess their representative's effectiveness at passing legislation that benefits the district. The right-hand column in Table 5.8 shows that small award, five message subjects evaluated their representative's legislative effectiveness substantially higher than subjects assigned to the large award, low frequency condition (0.30 unit increase, 95% confidence interval [0.03, 0.56]). And there fails to be a substantial increase in evaluations associated with more money. Subjects assigned to the large award, five message condition evaluate their representative as more effective than the small award, five message subjects—a 0.14 unit increase—though the difference is not statistically significant at standard levels (95% confidence interval [-0.14, 0.42]).

The increase in perceived effectiveness is coupled with a similar increase in overall

support. The right-hand plot in Figure 5.6 shows that increasing the number of credit claiming statements causes large increases in support for the legislator. Each point represents the average feeling thermometer evaluation for the subjects assigned to each of the four conditions and the lines are 95 percent confidence intervals. In both the single and five message conditions, we see that the amount of money claimed in the press releases fails to substantially or significantly increase the subjects' evaluations of their legislator—even though the large award conditions contained messages claiming credit for substantially more funds. Subjects assigned to the large award, single message condition had only a 1.6 unit higher evaluation of their representative over the small award, single message condition—a difference that is not significant at standard levels (95% confidence interval, [-2.75, 5.98]). Likewise, subjects in the large award, five message condition evaluated their representative 1.8 units higher than the small award, five message condition, but again the difference is not significant at standard levels (95% confidence interval [-3.07, 6.70]).

Thus, the money claimed had little effect on the evaluation of legislators, but the number of messages mattered substantially. Subjects assigned to the small award, five message condition evaluated their representative 5.63 units higher than those in the large award, single message condition (95% confidence interval [1.07, 10.17]). Spreading a relatively small amount of money over several messages is substantially more effective at building support than claiming credit for one large expenditure. To see how much more effective frequent messages are than claiming credit for large amounts of money, we compare how much each dollar claimed increased legislators' evaluations, relative to the baseline condition of the small award, low frequency condition. To measure this return, we divide the increase in average feeling thermometer

rating by the increase in the amount of funds claimed, measured in ten-thousand dollar units. This simple calculation reveals that frequently claiming credit for small amounts of money is a much more efficient way to cultivate support among constituents than increasing the total amount claimed. The return on the large award and five message condition is an increase in average feeling thermometer ratings of only 0.005 units per ten-thousand dollars claimed. The return for the small award, five message condition was much larger. For every ten-thousand dollars claimed in the small award high frequency condition, the average feeling thermometer increased 0.45 units—a per-dollar increase in support 90 times bigger than that found for the large award, high frequency condition.

Constituents, then, are much more responsive to the reported actions than the amount claimed. There are at least two salient psychological mechanisms to explain the prominent response to actions. One explanation is that constituents lack the ability to tally expenditures across the messages. As we argue in Chapter 2, numerical information is often much more difficult for constituents to use in intuitive evaluations. This is particularly true over repeated messages, which would require constituents to not only identify the amount claimed, but aggregate the amounts claimed over the messages. A second explanation is that constituents are unable to contextualize expenditures. As we argue above, constituents rarely have the information sufficient to know how different levels of spending will matter for local projects. If this is true, then even if constituents are able to identify differences in the expenditures, we should expect that they will struggle to incorporate those differences into their quickly formed evaluations.

At the end of the post-experiment survey for this study we asked our participants

a final question that allows us to assess the extent that these two mechanisms induce the lack of response to credit claiming messages. After all other relevant questions were asked and answered, we asked our participants to recall how much money their representative claimed in the emails they were sent. To make sure that our Mechanical Turk subjects did not cheat, we instructed them not to look at the previous emails and assured them that their compensation would not depend on the answer to this question.

Figure 5.7 shows that both mechanisms help explain why constituents are largely unresponsive to the amount claimed. The left-hand figure presents the average amount reported across the four conditions (the solid black points) and the true amounts claimed (open circles). To compactly display the amounts on a single plot, the horizontal axis is on a logarithmic scale, but we label values on the actual dollar scale for ease of interpretation.

The left-hand plot in Figure 5.7 shows that constituents recall broad differences in how much representatives claim credit for in the emails. When recalling the amount that their representative claimed credit for securing, participant responses correctly ranked the total amounts from the smallest amount claimed (the small award, single message condition) to the largest amount claimed (the large award, five message condition). And the differences across the conditions were often substantial. For example, participants in the large award, five message condition recalled their representative claiming credit for 32 times as much money as participants in the small award, five message condition.

Constituents approximately identify and recall broad differences in how much money legislators deliver to the district. That the differences in expenditure do not

subsequently affect differences in evaluations across constituents is evidence that constituents are unable to contextualize the amount claimed and include the differences in their assessments of their representative. Even when constituents are able to approximately recall the information in a credit claiming statement, they struggle to translate the quantitative information about different levels of spending into different levels of support for legislators. This is consistent with constituents who are not experts on local particularistic projects—and therefore are unsure what different levels of spending actually imply for their district. Given this lack of context, it is much easier for constituents to evaluate that a project may potentially come and who receives the money than condition responses on money.

While the left-hand plot in Figure 5.7 shows that participants are able to recall broad differences in the amount legislators claim credit for, systematic errors are still made in participants' tallies. In each condition participants underestimate the amount of money their representative claimed credit for securing. And the errors are larger when legislators claim credit for more money—both in magnitude and in share of the total amount delivered. To demonstrate the magnitude of the errors, the right-hand plot in Figure 5.7 presents the ratio of the funds our participants recall claimed to the total actual claimed. Participants in the small award, single message condition—the bottom line of the plot—underestimated the amount claimed by \$10,282—estimating that legislators claimed credit for only 31% of the total money announced. The numerous announcement of small awards appears to slightly increase the accuracy of assessments. Participants in the small award, five message condition were the most accurate across all four conditions, estimating that their legislators claimed credit for 41% of the total announced amount. The accuracy of the esti-

mates suffered substantially when large amounts of money were announced numerous times. Participants in the large award, five message condition—the top line—had an extremely poor estimate of the total amount claimed. Participants in this condition underestimated the total amount claimed by \$15.2 million dollars—estimating their legislator claimed credit for only 13.5% of the total funds actually claimed.

Constituents, then, not only struggled to contextualize and evaluate the amount of money claimed. They also systematically underestimated the amount legislators claimed to direct to the district, because they struggle to tally the amount delivered to the district. The variance in the percentage of funds recalled in the right-hand plot of Figure 5.7 also rules out an alternative and non-psychological mechanism to explain the effectiveness of sending several messages. Sending multiple messages may increase the probability that a participant actually reads the credit claiming statement—multiple messages make it more likely the treatment is actually received by our participants. But if the differences were explained by probability of reading an email, then we would expect there to be equal rates of recall across the conditions. And yet, the right-hand plot in Figure 5.7 shows substantial differences across conditions. Therefore, multiple messages do more than simply raise the probability that a constituents receives a message.

Together, our experimental results show that legislators can regularly claim credit for relatively small amounts of money to build an impression of influence over spending. In the next section, we show that our experimental results correspond with the credit legislators actually received when they claim credit for spending.

5.5 Credit Claiming and the Cultivation of Support outside of Experiments

Our experiments have provided precise estimates of how constituents respond to legislators' credit claiming message. And legislators appear to know, at least intuitively, that they can receive credit for relatively small spending allocations and for credit throughout the process. But we may remain concerned that the credit allocation we observe in our experiments differs from how constituents actually allocate credit. In this section we show that there is a relationship between legislators' credit claiming efforts and constituents' evaluations. This is evidence that the credit claiming process that we describe in press releases and experiments actually matters for representation.

To demonstrate the relationship between legislators' credit claiming efforts and constituents' evaluations we combine our measures of representatives' credit claiming rates in Chapter 3 with a new survey of constituents that assesses their existing attitudes towards their representative. We collected this new survey using a Survey Sample International (SSI) sample, census matched to correspond to the United States. To assess the external validity of our interventions, we replicate the questions we asked in our survey experiments in this new survey. We ask constituents to evaluate how effective their legislator is at delivering federal money to the district and to provide an overall evaluation of their representative.⁶ We then regress the responses to this question on legislators' credit claiming rates.

While this design allows us to assess actual behavior from legislators with the response of their constituents, it comes at the cost of experimental control over the

⁶This survey contained only partisans—constituents who identified with either the Republican or Democratic party.

credit claiming messages. We attempt to minimize the potential bias in our estimates by conditioning on characteristics of constituents that might affect how they evaluate their representative. This includes constituents’ socioeconomic characteristics, whether they are from the same party as the representative, and constituent ideology. To account for several of respondents sharing the same representative we estimated a multilevel model that allowed the intercept to vary across legislators. Of course this design does not completely eliminate potential bias in the estimate of the effect of legislator credit claiming, but it does provide a robust model for assessing the covariance between credit claiming and evaluations.

Table 5.9: The Observational Effect of Legislator Credit Claiming

	Effective Delivering Money	Feeling Thermometer
Overall	0.13 [0.00, 0.25]	2.1 [0.07, 4.20]
Co-partisans	0.06 [-0.1, 0.22]	1.68 [-1.02, 4.34]
Opposing Partisans	0.22 [0.03, 0.41]	2.71 [-0.47, 5.91]

The left-hand column in Table 5.9 shows the relationship between representatives’ credit claiming rates and constituents’ evaluations of their effectiveness of delivering federal money to the district. The top row in the plot shows the overall relationship between legislators’ credit claiming efforts and constituents’ evaluations, revealing that legislators who engage in more credit claiming are viewed as more effective at delivering money to their district. The increase in credit claiming leads to a predicted increase in effectiveness of 0.13 points—about 10% of the size associated with the increase in effectiveness from having a copartisan as a representative (95 percent confidence interval [0.00, 0.25]). The next two rows in the left-hand column shows that

this increase is particularly large for opposing partisans: legislators' credit claiming rates appear to be best at cultivating an impression of influence among those who would otherwise not want to vote for the legislator. A 15 percentage point increase in credit claiming rate leads to a predicted increase of effectiveness of 0.22 points.

Legislators' credit claiming efforts also appear to affect their overall evaluations with constituents. The right-hand column in Table 5.9 shows that this credit claiming is effective: legislators with higher credit claiming rates have higher evaluations among constituents. The top row shows that the same 15 percentage point increase in a legislator's credit claiming rate increases a feeling thermometer evaluation 2.1 points (95 percent confidence interval, [0.1, 4.2]). Again, this increase is strongest among opposing partisans, with the increase in credit claiming rate associated with an increase of 2.7 points, while only a 1.7 point increase among copartisans.

This observational evidence shows that legislators' credit claiming rates appear to affect constituent evaluations—both of how effective legislators are at delivering money to the district and overall evaluations of the legislator. Legislators who engage in higher rates of credit claiming are evaluated as more effective at delivering money to their district and have a higher overall evaluation. This demonstrates that the credit claiming dynamic that we examine in this chapter is not just an artifact of our experimental setup or contained in press releases that never affect constituents—it actually matters for the politics of representation. This finding does not, however, imply that all legislators should just claim credit for spending in all their press releases. This implication does not follow, in part, because the credit allocated depends on who legislators represent. Legislators' credit claiming is most effective at cultivating support with opposing partisans. This helps explain why legislators who are marginal

allocate more effort to credit claiming. The observed credit claiming rates are also part of a broader rhetorical strategy for legislators (Grimmer, 2013). Even marginal legislators must appeal to their partisan base when presenting their work, limiting the potential to completely abandon non-particularistic issues.

5.6 Conclusion: Representation and Reform with Intuitive Constituents

We have shown how constituents allocate credit in response to legislators' credit claiming messages. Constituents reward legislators for the report of an action and evaluate the type of expenditure, but have a limited response to the amount of legislators report securing. Legislators appear responsive to this type of credit allocation, claiming credit for expenditures throughout the appropriations process and for relatively small amounts of money. And we have shown that our results are, at least in part, externally valid. Legislators who claim credit for spending at a higher rate are viewed as more effective at delivering money to their district and have a higher overall evaluation.

How constituents allocate credit in response to credit claiming messages complicates constituents' task of holding legislators accountable for spending in the district. Though, this complication need not make it harder to hold legislators accountable, nor need it harm representation. Indeed, the ways constituents allocate credit to legislators may lead to outcomes that constituents prefer over outcomes that may occur if they rewarded legislators based on the size of actual expenditures as they occur in the district.

When constituents reward legislators throughout the appropriations process, they may incentivize legislators to produce greater spending for the district. This is a basic insight from principal-agent models of accountability (Bolton and Dewatripont, 2005; Ashworth, 2012). Securing expenditures for a district often requires legislators to expend effort, but even if legislators work dutifully to direct funds to the district some projects may fail. For example, spending bills may be revised before passage, removing funds a legislator earmarked for a district. Or executive agencies may redirect earmarked funds or projects may be revised, negating the impact of the spending (Frisch and Kelly, 2011). This uncertainty about spending could dampen legislative effort to direct funds to the district. If legislators only receive credit for expenditures that actually occur, then effort spent on projects that do not yield spending in the district is wasted. The risk that effort may be wasted may push legislators into other activities. But rewarding the act of requesting, in addition to securing the expenditure, makes pursuing spending more attractive to legislators. It ensures that legislators can receive immediate benefits from requesting the expenditure, in addition to the benefits from delivering the money. This additional reward may encourage legislators to expend more effort in the appropriations process, directing more money to the district.

Constituents' focus on the type of expenditure may also cause improved budgets. A persistent concern in models of distributive politics in legislatures is that representatives' electoral incentives cause over spending. Single-member districts, such as House districts, concentrates the benefits of particularistic spending in a single district and spreads the costs across all districts. The diffused costs causes legislators to spend more on their individual districts than they would if serving a national

constituency, resulting in over spending (Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen, 1981).

When constituents reward legislators for the type of expenditure or the number of messages they blunt the mechanism that drives over expenditures. If constituents reward the type of expenditure and the number of messages, then legislators can cultivate support with many smaller projects. The projects that are smaller in scope dampen the need to exceed efficient levels of expenditures and cause budget overruns in the aggregate. By evaluating the type of expenditure and the number of projects, constituents may create incentives to align the optimal political allocations with the optimal economic allocations.

The credit claiming, credit allocation process also empowers constituents to hold legislators accountable for the types of expenditures that occur in the district. Of course, legislators may secure money for an unpopular recipient and simply neglect to announce that expenditure to constituents. But the process that we document in this chapter shows that there are additional costs to delivering unpopular spending to the district. Not only will legislators have to expend effort in the institution to deliver money to the recipient. They will also pay an electoral opportunity cost: every project directed to unpopular recipients is one less project that could be used for claiming credit with constituents and building popular support. This creates incentives to create expenditures for popular projects in the district.

Yet, there are potential risks to accountability as well. If legislators receive credit for merely requesting expenditures and not for actual expenditures, they may shirk or under provide money for the district. Taken to the extreme, legislators may regularly claim credit for requesting money for the district, but fail to actually deliver that money. The result is that legislators would create an impression of influence over

expenditures and yet deliver no money to the district. A related concern is that legislators may free ride on the work of their colleagues. House members and senators may collaborate to announce a project, when the effort in delivering the project is more evenly split.

In both cases legislators are deceiving constituents —legislators leading constituents to believe something that differs from the truth. We believe, however, that this deception would be difficult to sustain for long. Other political actors have incentive to ensure that legislators actually deliver projects to the district. Local officials often depend on federal expenditures to secure their budgets. Congressional colleagues are unlikely to tolerate representatives who contribute little to actually delivering the projects. And constituents do reward legislators slightly more for *securing* money for the district, providing slight additional incentives to deliver money. So shirking is certainly possible, but is likely only possible to sustain for a short period of time.

Rewarding legislators for the act of requesting, however, creates incentives for legislators to make requests more readily accessible and salient to the public. This suggests a different interpretation of recent reforms to the appropriations process. After the 2006 midterm elections and a series of lobbying related scandals both the House and Senate adopted reforms to the earmarking process in spending bills. The hope was to increase transparency, ensuring that members of Congress could be easily held accountable for securing spending for campaign donors. To do this, an earmark database was created and the member responsible for requesting the earmark was identified.

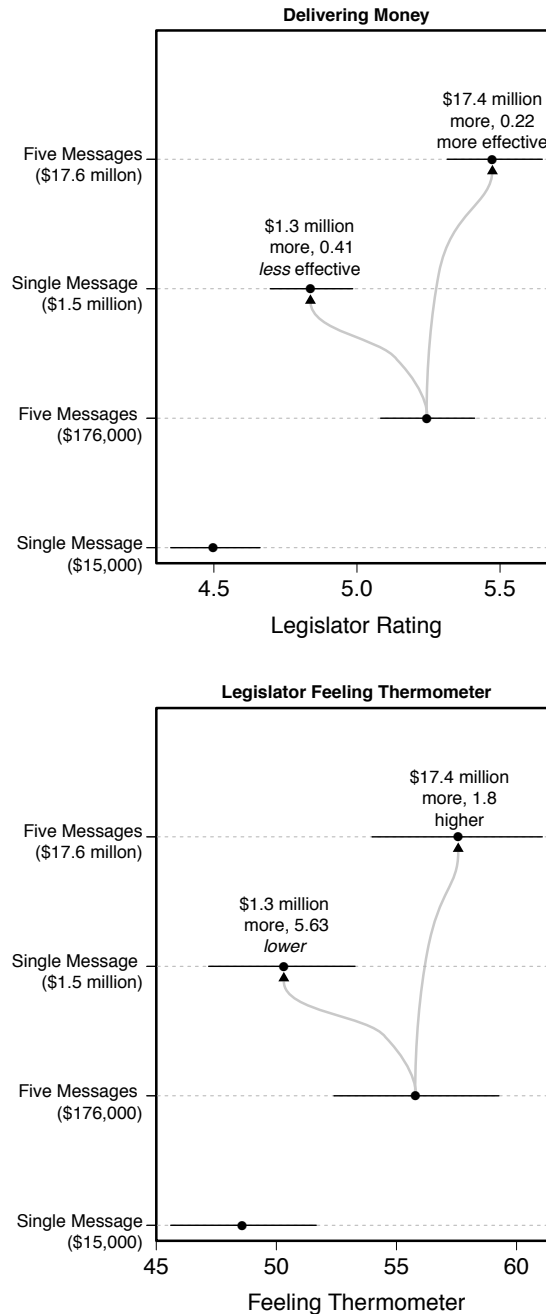
The reforms did have an effect on earmark transparency. As Stephen Slivinski of the Cato Institute explains, before the reform, “numerous congressmen could often

take credit for a single project. There was no official way to verify who was really the main supporter of the earmark” (Slivinski, 2007). Slivinski goes on to explain that the reform created a way to identify who requested an expenditure, analogizing it to “intellectual property protection for government waste” (Slivinski, 2007). After the reform those who merely requested an expenditure would have official record of the request and a guarantee that they would be clearly associated with the spending.

The attempt to eliminate corruption in the earmarking process instead created a prominent place for legislators to broadcast that they requested money for constituents—perhaps making the earmarking process more electorally valuable than before the reform.

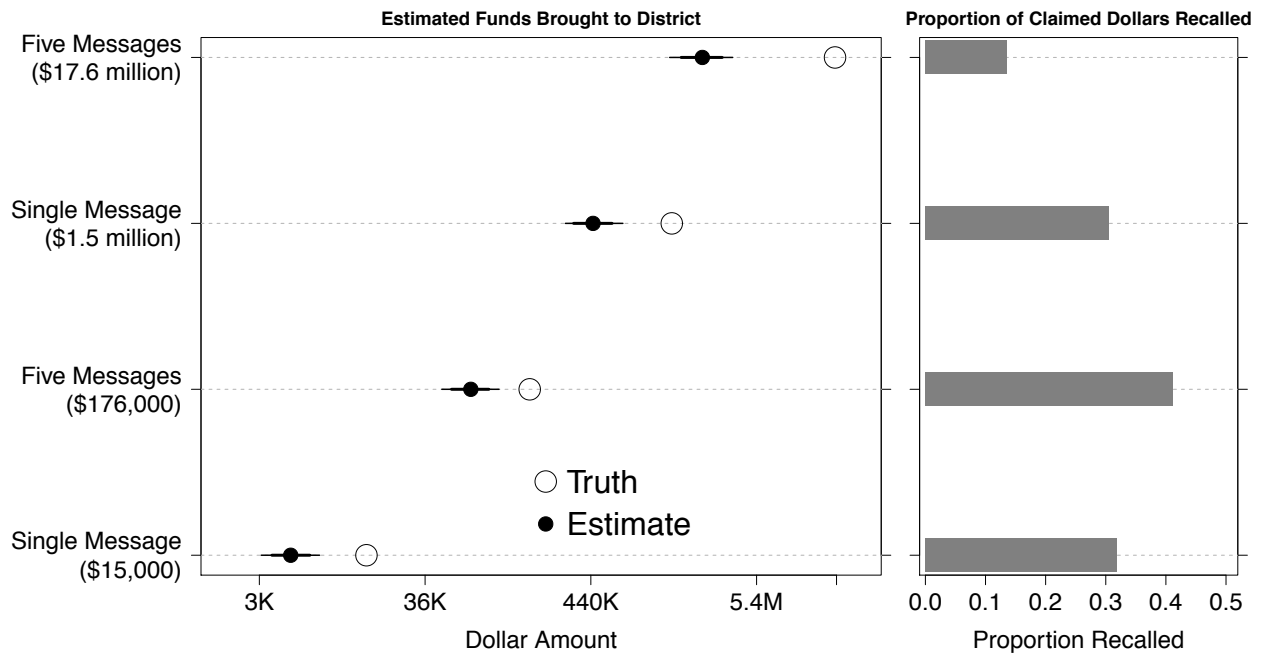
The potential for subtle deception is a persistent concern when constituents allocate credit in response to legislators’ credit claiming efforts. In the next chapter we show a subtle linguistic deception. And we show why constituents may prefer to be deceived.

Figure 5.6: Number of Messages Dominates the Amount Claimed



This figure shows that multiple messages cultivate more support than increasing the amount claimed. The left-hand plot presents subjects' evaluations of their legislator's effectiveness at delivering money to the district. The points are the average evaluations and the lines are 95-percent confidence intervals. Even though there is \$1.3 million more announced in the large award, single message condition (second line) subjects evaluated their representative as less effective at delivering money than the small award, five message condition (third line). And the large increase in money claimed in the large award, five message condition (top line) does not result in substantially higher evaluations. The right-hand plot shows a similar effect of more messages on feeling thermometer evaluations—the number of messages dominates the amount claimed.

Figure 5.7: Constituents Only Loosely Recall Total Expenditures



This figure shows the average amount of money participants recall their representative claiming credit for delivering (solid points) and the actual amounts delivered (open points), presented against a log-scale. We present the exponentiated axis for ease of interpretation. Experiment participants were able to recover the correct rank order of the amount delivered. But across conditions we see that the participants underestimate the amount delivered to the district. And the errors increase as the amount of money delivered increases. Providing one explanation for why constituents fail to be responsive to the increased amount of money delivered.

Chapter 6

Credit, Deception, and Institutional Design

Our evidence thus far shows that constituents are responsive to the actions legislators claim credit for performing. Constituents evaluate projects based on who receives the money and who claims credit for the spending, but are much less responsive to the amount spent on a project. In this chapter we show that the value of claiming credit for actions and the opportunity to *imply* influence over expenditures helps explain a long standing puzzle in American political economy. Federal expenditures occur through a large number of federal programs, with each of the many programs administered by a small number of bureaucrats (Lowi, 1969; Stein and Bickers, 1997). While this structure of federal spending evolved for diverse reasons, we show in this chapter that legislators' strategic credit claiming and constituents' response help explain how many of the programs survive. Strategic bureaucrats create credit claiming opportunities for legislators, which legislators value because constituents reward legislators for implications nearly as much as when credit claiming is explicit. In return for the

credit claiming opportunities, legislators reward bureaucrats with continued funding for their program. The result is that the many federal programs are maintained and that legislators have a broader set of activities to claim credit for securing.

We provide direct evidence for each stage of this process. Using a case study, we demonstrate how bureaucrats create credit claiming opportunities to cultivate support. We examine the *Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program* (AFGP), a competitive grant program administered through the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) in the Department of Homeland Security. We show that bureaucrats at the AFGP funnel information to representatives' offices, providing members of Congress the opportunity to announce the grants before notifying the actual grant recipients. Using comprehensive data sets of agency announcements and legislator press releases, we show that legislators regularly take advantage of the opportunity, with representatives' press releases occurring about two days prior to the formal agency announcement.

Even though legislators are unable to directly claim credit for the spending from executive agencies, it is valuable to legislators because they are able to cultivate an impression of influence over the expenditures by merely implying they are responsible for the spending. We show how legislators use language to encourage constituents to infer that their representative is responsible for the spending. To do this, legislators *announce* an expenditure, rather than stating they explicitly secured the money. We use a pair of survey experiments to show that this implication works: whether legislators say they explicitly secured an expenditure or simply announce a grant, constituents infer that legislators are responsible for securing the money. Our experiments show that this occurs because constituents infer that legislators who announce

expenditures are responsible for securing the money—insuring that legislators can create an impression of influence, even without literally claiming credit for money.

The credit claiming opportunities the AFGP creates help insulate the program from budget cuts. Even though the AFGP is regularly criticized as inefficient (Staff, 2006*b*; Muhlhausen, 2009, 2012), members of Congress continue to protect the agency’s budget. Using roll call votes on a pair of amendments that saved the AFGP’s budget from massive cuts, we show that legislators who take advantage of the AFGP’s credit claiming opportunities are systematically more likely to favor protecting the agency’s budget. Bureaucrats at the program create credit claiming opportunities and legislators value the opportunity to appear influential. Legislators express their appreciation by continuing to fund the program.

We may be tempted to label the process we describe in this chapter as normatively bad for representation. This may be because legislators are deceiving constituents—causing constituents to believe something that is only partially true. Deception may have a corrosive effect on the representative constituent relationship (Mansbridge, 2003), it may violate widely held ethical standards (Kant, 1983), or it may allow legislators to shirk and underprovide public goods to the district and receive credit for expenditures. We may justify the deception, however, because it leads to better policy outcomes. A large literature is concerned that legislators political influence in Congress will cause economically inefficient expenditures in districts. One solution may be to delegate the authority to allocate grants to an outside authority, but this eliminate the potential political benefit for legislators to direct spending to their district. And this might undermine Congressional support for the program. But when bureaucrats create credit claiming opportunities for legislators they create value for

the politicians. This cultivates Congressional support for the more efficient allocation of grants, solving a challenge in institutional design.

This chapter shows one way that the credit claiming, credit allocation process affects the ways the federal government disburses money. The value of credit claiming alone ensures programs can cultivate support when they might otherwise be politically vulnerable. We begin the chapter explaining how federal agencies allocate money and how bureaucrats cultivate support for their programs.

6.1 The Structure of Federal Spending and the Incentive to Cultivate Bureaucratic Support

As scholars have long observed, there are an abundance of federal programs that determine how the federal government spends large amounts of money (Lowi, 1969; Stein and Bickers, 1997). The numerous and diverse programs create a risk for bureaucrats: members of Congress may forget why programs were created or, worse yet, may perceive the programs to be wasteful. Older programs may serve problems that the current Congress views as less pressing—particularly when the ideological composition of Congress changes dramatically (Berry, Burden and Howell, 2010*a*). The risk has been amplified recently. For example, in February of 2011 the House passed a continuing resolution to continue the fund federal government. During the process, Tea Party freshman (and some Democrats) submitted a series of earmarks to cut funding for programs. Some of the cuts were arbitrary. Robert Draper describes how Tea Party freshman, Jeff Duncan (R-SC), “also wanted a piece of the [program cutting] action. He sent his legislative director, Joshua Gross, on a mission

to find some program to cut so that he [Duncan] could introduce an amendment” (Draper, 2012). While an extreme example, this is indicative of bureaucrats’ broader concern: that their program will be targeted for funding cuts and that they will lack Congressional allies to defend their agency’s budget.

Bureaucrats, then, have a basic goal—they need to defend their program and its budget. To do this, bureaucrats need to clarify their value to members of Congress. Many bureaucrats are well positioned to cultivate this support by exploiting their ability to offer members of Congress the opportunity to claim credit for agency grant expenditures. Outside of earmarks and formulas in spending bills, legislation rarely details exactly how to spend money for a program. This leaves disbursement decisions to bureaucrats (Arnold, 1979; Berry, Burden and Howell, 2010*b*). Strategic agency officials can exploit this discretion to achieve their goal of sustaining their agency and increasing its budget. Bureaucrats at many funding programs, such as the Army Corps of Engineers (Ferejohn, 1974), have discretion over how their funds are allocated. This allows them to strategically manipulate funding decisions to build support for their programs (Arnold 1979, Wildavsky 1984, Hird 1991, Grose and Bertelli 2009). Bureaucrats funnel money to legislators’ districts, creating opportunities for legislators to claim credit for increased funding in their district. Legislators, in turn, ensure that the agency survives authorization votes and receives a larger budget (Ferejohn, 1974; Arnold, 1979).¹

¹Another mechanism to explain agency survival is that motivated interest groups, coupled with bureaucrats, ensure that representatives remember a program is valuable. Stein and Bickers (1997) argue that the structure of spending programs, and the constituencies the programs serve, insulate programs from cuts and defend bureaucrats’ jobs. This occurs because some programs serve motivated interest groups who benefit substantially from the programs. For example, police groups closely track funding levels for the Edward Byrne Memorial grant program—money that is used to hire and train new police officers. The motivated interest groups, according to Stein and Bickers’ (1997) theory, apply pressure to Congress if funding levels or the overall program is threatened.

Officials at competitive grant programs share the same goals as bureaucrats with more discretion over spending decisions. Like other agency officials, bureaucrats at competitive grant programs want their program to continue and to expand their budget (Personal Interviews, Wildavsky 1984). But bureaucrats at competitive programs lack the tools other bureaucrats often employ to build support for their program. Enacting legislation often constrains bureaucrats at competitive programs, making it difficult for them to target money to specific Congressional districts. This places them at a disadvantage when trying to build support with their Congressional principles. Many of the programs have constraints written in the authorizing legislation and the Code of Federal Regulations that limit bureaucratic discretion over where the grants are allocated. In some cases, the laws and regulations make it exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible, for bureaucrats to direct funds at legislators crucial to the agency's survival.

But bureaucrats at competitive programs have other tools available to build support for their program. As we have shown, legislators receive credit for actions performed throughout the Appropriations process. And bureaucrats that oversee competitive programs know that legislators value the opportunity to announce grants allocated to their district—even if legislators have only an indirect role in influencing the expenditure. To build support bureaucrats at competitive grant programs manipulate how grants are announced—creating credit claiming opportunities to cultivate Congressional support.

Perhaps the most effective manipulation is delaying the official agency announcement of an award, providing members of Congress the right of first announcement.

But even if interest groups can defend some programs, risk averse bureaucrats are unlikely to rely solely upon outside groups to defend their programs. Instead we expect that bureaucrats will pursue further assurances that their program will be protected from potential cuts.

Agency officials funnel information about a new grant award to Congressional offices after the official award decision is made, but before the agency announces the new grant. This ensures that local officials receiving the grants learn the good news from their members of Congress and that local news coverage of grant disbursements will focus on the representative's announcements. Agency officials view this manipulation as one of the most effective tools for building support. One agency official told us in an interview that it was essential for achieving her goal of making "sure that legislators remember that this program is valuable *to them* [members of Congress] during authorization votes" (Personal Interview). Indeed, the delay in announcing an expenditure is sufficiently important to be codified in official agency policy. As we detail in the Conclusion of this chapter, easily acquired minutes from meetings in agencies clarify that agency officials dictate delays in agency grant announcements as part of official policy.

Bureaucrats create the credit claiming opportunities for legislators because representatives value the opportunity to announce the grant awards. Announcing an expenditure is valuable because it allows legislators to *imply* they were influential over the expenditure—even if they avoid explicitly claiming credit. This implication occurs, in part, because of the basic structure of language. To fully understand the content of a conversation or statement, inferences must often be made, based on both the logical content of a sentence and the context in which it is spoken (Grice, 1989). These inferences, called implicatures, make language more efficient—allowing sentences to have meaning based on their context and the identity of the speakers. But the use of implications creates the possibility for subtle deceptions. A speaker may imply they are responsible for performing some action—even when their actual

influence over that action is minute. This subtle deception allows legislators to avoid accusations of lying—while still effectively claiming credit for something where they have only limited influence.

Implicatures are all the more effective because our brains will strive to find causal relationships when reading statements from legislators (Hassin, Bargh and Uleman, 2002; Van Berkum, 2008; Kahneman, 2011). Hassin, Bargh and Uleman (2002) document the occurrence of spontaneous causal inferences—causal inferences that are made even though “people are unaware of the intention to make the causal inference...and unaware of the inference itself” (Hassin, Bargh and Uleman, 2002, 515). The spontaneous causal inferences are especially likely when reading texts. When reading causally our brains attempt to find a coherent sequence of events, even when this coherence is not explicitly provided. And psychologists have found that “one of the main factors that determines coherence is causality” (Hassin, Bargh and Uleman, 2002). Our brains automatically find a causal relationship when reading quickly (or listening) to make statements coherent.

Even if not explicitly, legislators and their staff intuitively understand how to exploit language to claim credit, even when the actual influence over the expenditure is indirect or small. This is apparent in how legislators claim credit for grants allocated to their district. Consider Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ), who regularly claims credit for small grants awarded to local fire departments in his districts. For example, on August 9th, 2007 LoBiondo “announced that the Bargaintown Volunteer Fire Company in Egg Harbor Township was awarded \$64,273 in federal funding for the purchase of new portable radios” (LoBiondo, 2007). On January 17th, 2006, LoBiondo announced that the “Laureldale Fire Department in Hamilton Township was awarded \$114,000...for

the purchase of new air packs” (LoBiondo, 2006*a*). And on December 29th, 2005, he “announced that the Longport Volunteer Fire Department was awarded \$51,661... to help them with their continued fire operations and safety programs” (LoBiondo, 2005). LoBiondo explained that the fire departments deserve of the support because “day in and day out, the men and women of our fire and rescue units are the first responders to emergency events in our communities.”

LoBiondo’s credit claiming reflects a broader pattern in how members of Congress claim credit for federal grants—a pattern present both in what he claimed credit for obtaining—grants to local fire departments—and how he claimed credit for the grants. For each grant, LoBiondo announced that the grants had been awarded. This language is carefully chosen to imply that LoBiondo was responsible for the grant awards. And similar language is frequently used by other members of congress: representatives from both parties regularly announce that the grants have been allocated. For example, Kenny Hulshof (R-MO) “announced today that the Fulton Fire Department has been award a grant for \$198,561” (Hulshof, 2006); Nick Rahall (D-WV) “announced today that the Rhodell Fire Department has been award \$147,689” (Rahall, 2008); Spencer Bachus (R-AL) “ announced that federal fire grants have been awarded to the Stewartville Volunteer Fire Department and to Maplesville Fire and Rescue” (Bachus, 2008); Aaron Schock (R-IL) “announced today Pittsfield Fire Rescue Department and Beardstown Fire Department will be receiving Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG)” (Schock, 2009); David Davis (R-TN) “announced today a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Assistance to Firefighters Grant to the Kingsport Fire Department for \$97,200”; and Elijah Cummings (D-MD), John Sarbanes (D-MD), Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) “announced

Howard County Fire and Rescue Services have been awarded more than \$1.3 million in federal funding” (Cummings, 2009). In each of these examples the member (or members) of Congress is never literally claiming credit for the expenditure.

Legislators also announce other types of grant awards to the district, with the same goal of implying they are responsible for the expenditures. On August 20th, 2010 Jerry Costello (D-IL) “announced today that the City of Marion has received a \$10,277 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance grant” (Costello, 2010). When announcing the grant, Costello assured his constituents that he would “continue to work to make this funding a priority in the federal budget.” On March 7th, 2010 Bart Stupak “announced that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has awarded more than \$6.7 million in grants to six airports in Michigan’s First Congressional District” (Stupak, 2009). And Pete Visclosky (D-IN) issued a press release titled “Visclosky Announces \$279,586 for Valparaiso University”, which explains that “Congressman Visclosky announced that Valparaiso University received a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs” (Visclosky, 2013).

A quick and superficial reading of the press releases leaves us with the impression that each of the legislators are responsible for the spending. Yet, a closer and more literal examination of the statements reveals that in each press release the legislators only announce the spending and never explicitly claim credit for having secured the expenditure. Rather, it is up to the reader to infer that the representative is responsible for the expenditure, based on the implications in the press release and our brain’s pursuit of coherence through causality. The distinction between credit implied and credit claimed is even more obvious when examining how legislators talk

about expenditures secured through earmarked funds in the appropriations process. For example, consider how David Obey (D-WI) claimed credit for money that he earmarked to construct a building in his district. After attending a ground breaking ceremony, Obey explained that he “*secured* \$1.5 million in last year’s federal budget to help the Village construct the new facility” (emphasis added) (Obey, 2006).

Legislators and their press secretaries, then, carefully use language to encourage constituents to infer that their representative is responsible for directing money to the district. Constituents are more likely to infer that a legislator who announces spending is responsible for securing it because of contextual cues from our own personal experiences (Van Berkum, 2008). Most constituents know that representatives can direct money to the district, even if constituents only have an approximate understanding of how this occurs. Representatives include extraneous facts to make the automatic causal attribution more likely. For example, legislators often suggest that their committee assignments were important for securing a grant, even when the committee has little role in grant oversight. When Ben Cardin (D-MD) announces grants he reminds constituents that he “is on the Budget Committee,” even though the Budget committee has no role in appropriating or oversight of the program that disburses the particular grant he announces (Cardin, 2007). Richard Shelby begins his grant announcements by describing himself as, “a senior member of the Appropriations committee” (Shelby, 2005) and both Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) point out their position on the Homeland security appropriations subcommittee (Specter, 2007; Mikulski, 2007).

The credit claiming, credit allocation process explains how creating credit claiming opportunities helps bureaucrats cultivate support for their programs. Constituents’

rapid evaluation of credit claiming statements causes them to attribute credit to legislators for expenditures, even when those legislators never literally claim credit for the spending. Legislators enhance this with additional facts to make the causal inference more plausible. This, then, makes the opportunity to claim credit for an expenditure that occurs with only indirect influence from the legislator as valuable as funding legislators are more directly responsible for securing. And the result is that bureaucrats can cultivate support for their program through the creation of credit claiming opportunities.

6.2 Study 1: Inferences about Influence and the Value of Announcements

The credit claiming, credit allocation process explains why legislators value announcing grants, because they need to only imply they are responsible for an expenditure to receive credit from constituents. We expect this will occur because constituents are quickly evaluating the content of legislators' statements, inferring that legislators caused the expenditure to occur. We test our predictions about constituents inferring responsibility with an experimental design that allows us to isolate how legislators claim credit for the expenditures and what information constituents have available about how their legislator secured the grant.

We conducted this experiment twice—replicating the same finding in different populations and with different information about the representative provided to participants. In the first instance of the experiment we recruited 316 participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. We told our participants that we are evaluating how

the public feels about local funding and then presented the subjects with a news article about a hypothetical representative, where the content varied by the participant's randomly assigned conditions.

To assess whether constituents infer that a representative is responsible for an expenditure they announce, our experiment simultaneously varied the *action* that legislators report and the *information* constituents have to interpret the action. We summarize our treatment in Table 6.1. The action conditions vary the verb representatives use to report the grant allocation. Participants in the *secured* condition read a newspaper article with the headline “Representative Secures Vital Funding for Local Fire Departments.” And the main body of the article states that “The representative secured the money to replace aging equipment.” We use the verb *secure* to replicate how legislators claim credit for earmarking money for the district and to provide a clear meaning to the sentence when read literally: the representative is responsible for delivering the money to the district. Participants in the *announced* condition read a newspaper article where the representative merely announces the expenditure. Participants in this condition see a headline that declares that the “Representative Announces Vital Funding for Local Fire Departments.” This condition, replicates the *implication* legislators use to receive credit for spending without literally claiming credit.

The second condition varies the information that participants have available to interpret the legislator's credit claiming effort. Delivering this information allows us to explicitly affect what our participants conclude after reading the newspaper article. We deliver this information in the form of a *civics lesson*—a brief paragraph that explains how the program allocates funds. Participants who are assigned to the

no civics condition see no additional information and simply receive the treatment described in the previous paragraph. Participants assigned to the *civics* condition and also assigned to the *secured* condition learned that the “representative inserted funding for the fire departments directly into the bill.” This reinforces the conclusion that the representative is primarily responsible for delivering the money to the district. Participants in the *civics* condition and also assigned to the *announced* condition were provided with a paragraph that explained that “Government watchdog groups hail the [fire grant] program for its lack of influence from members of Congress,” and that “The representative was informed about the awards after the committee finalized its decisions.” This information prevents participants from inferring that the legislator was responsible for securing the expenditure and instead informs participants that the legislator is *only* announcing that the expenditure was made.

After randomly assigning participants to conditions and providing them with the treatment, we asked them to assess how responsible the representative and the agency was for the award, with the responsibility score ranging from 0 to 100. We use this scale to obtain an impressionistic assessment of how constituents allocate credit in response to the subtle differences across our treatments.

The left-hand plot in Figure 6.1 shows that participants infer legislators are responsible for an expenditure, even when the representative merely announces the spending. The lines in the left-hand plot present the difference between the credit participants allocate the representative and agency under the *announced* condition to the credit allocated under the *secured* condition. The bottom pair of lines present the difference without a civics lesson, while the top pair of lines presents the difference when we provide the civics lesson. The point is the average difference and the line is

Table 6.1: Article Content Across Conditions

Headline: Representative [Secures/Announces] Vital Funding for Local Fire Departments

Body: A representative announced \$250,000 in funding for local fire departments yesterday. [The representative secured the money to replace aging equipment/ No additional content if Announce Condition].

”Firefighters and emergency service personnel dedicate themselves to protecting the health and safety of our district,” said the legislator. ”This funding will help our local fire departments by providing them the means to obtain the best equipment and training available.”

Secured and Civics Lesson: The Homeland Security Appropriations bill passed out of the House of Representatives. The representative inserted funding for the fire departments directly into the bill. Specifically, the representative inserted a provision that directs FEMA’s Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program (AFGP) to award \$250,000 to local fire departments.

Announced and Civics Lesson: Government watchdog groups hail the program for its lack of influence from members of Congress. A computer scoring algorithm initially evaluates each application. For those scored sufficiently high, a committee of expert fire chiefs evaluate the proposals for effectiveness, appropriateness and overall community need. The representative was informed of the awards after the committee finalized its decisions.

Treatments

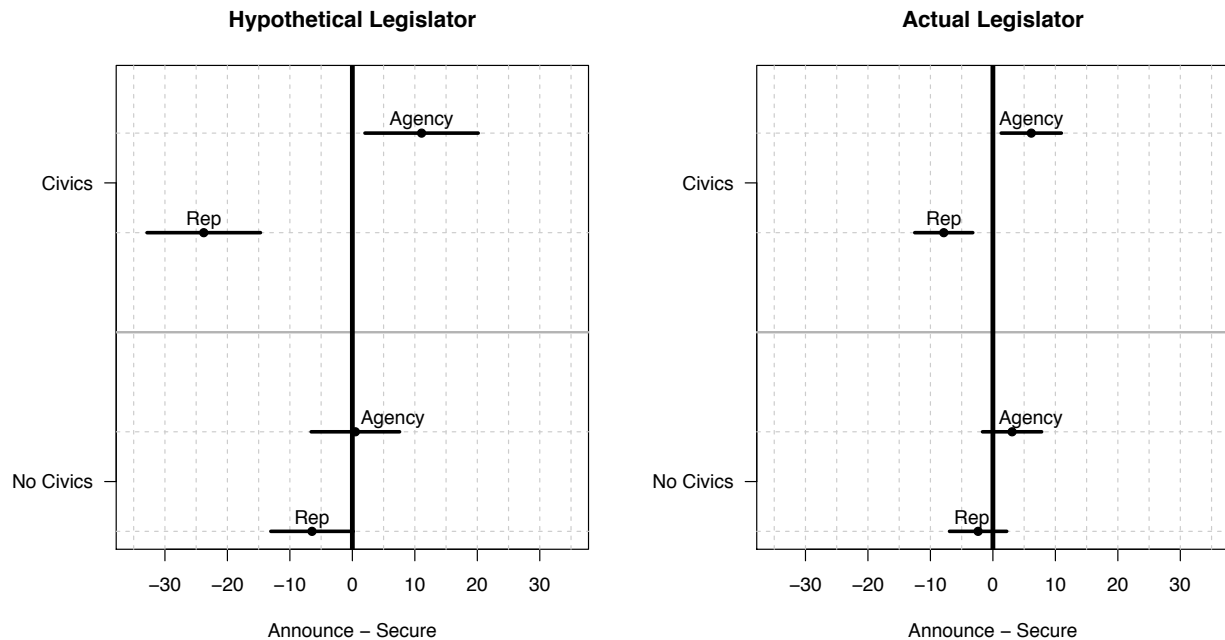
Actions: [Secures/Announces]

a 95 percent confidence interval.

Without a civics lesson, representatives receive nearly the same credit for announcing or securing a grant. Participants in the *announced* condition allocate 6.5 points less credit to the legislator than participants in the *secured* condition, but the relatively small number of participants in our study make for a wide confidence interval (95 percent confidence interval, [-15.52, 2.61]). While legislators receive slightly less credit, they still receive the majority of credit for the expenditure when announcing the expenditure. Participants allocated 67.6 percent of the credit to representatives

in the *secured* condition, while participants allocated 61.1 percent of the credit in the *announce* condition. The verb legislators use to report the grant also does not affect the credit our participants allocate to the agency. We find essentially no difference in the agency’s credit (0.5 points more credit when announced, 95 percent confidence interval [-6.6, 7.6]).

Figure 6.1: Implications Lead to Constituent Credit Allocation



This figure shows the results of our study, which we conducted twice. The left-hand plot shows the results of our study conducted on a group of Mechanical Turk participants, using a hypothetical representative. The right-hand plot shows the results of our study for a more representative group of participants, using an actual representative. In both experiments, we show that constituents infer their representative is responsible for securing a grant—even when that credit is only implied in legislators’ statements.

Representatives who merely announce funding receive almost the same amount of credit as legislators who secured the expenditures. Providing the civics lesson shows that this occurs because participants infer that legislators who announce an

expenditure are *responsible* for obtaining the spending. The second line from the top shows the difference in the credit allocated to legislators for participants in the announce and secured condition when the civics lesson is provided. Participants in the announce condition allocated 23.7 points less credit when legislators announce the expenditure than when legislators secured the expenditure (95 percent confidence interval, [-32.9, -14.7]).

This occurs because the civics lesson causes participants in the announce condition to substantially lower the credit allocated to the legislator—evidence that the participants are no longer inferring their representative is responsible for the spending. Participants in the announce condition who receive a civics lesson allocate 44.7 percent of the credit to the representative— *16.4* fewer points than participants in the announce condition allocate to the representative when no civics information is provided [-25.6, -7.3]). The effect of the civics lesson on participants in the announce condition is substantial, but the civics lesson has no effect on participants in the secured condition. Participants in the secured condition who receive the civics lesson only increase the credit allocated to the representative 0.9 percentage points, an increase that is neither substantively nor statistically significant (95 percent confidence interval, [-5.6, 7.4]). This is evidence that constituents have already inferred that the representative is primarily responsible for securing the expenditure and so additional information reinforcing this point fails to change the conclusion reached.

This experiment shows that announcing an expenditure causes constituents to infer that the representative is responsible for the expenditure—nearly as responsible as when the legislator secures the expenditure. Revealing additional information disrupts the inference and prevents the legislator from receiving credit—causing a

substantial drop in the representative's responsibility for securing the grant.

The results of this iteration of the study are clear. But concerns may linger about our conclusion. One concern is that the use of a hypothetical legislator amplifies the effect of the civics lesson. Additional information that is provided when using an actual representative may dampen the responsiveness to the intervention. A second concern is that we have a relatively small sample size, making more precise inferences difficult to make.

To address these concerns we replicated our first study, but included actual legislators rather than hypothetical representatives and used a more representative sample of participants. In the second iteration of this study we used 1,048 participants from the Survey Sampling International (SSI) panel, matching on census characteristics. Using participant zip codes we identified the participant's Congressional district and corresponding House member. We then replaced "A representative" in Table 6.1 with the name and party affiliation of each respondent's representative. The rest of the study proceeded as in the other conditions: we randomly assigned participants to one of the four conditions and then assessed the credit allocated to the legislator and agency.

The right-hand plot in Figure 6.1 contains the results of this second experiment, demonstrating that this second study replicates our findings. As in the first study, we see that participants find only small differences between legislators who *announce* a grant and legislators who secure an expenditure. Participants in the *announced* condition, without additional information, allocate only 2.4 percentage points less credit than participants in the *secured* condition (95 percent confidence interval [-6.9, 2.2]). Again, we find that announcing or securing a grant causes constituents to reach

the same conclusion: the representative is responsible for the expenditure.

As in the first experiment, including civics information causes participants to revise their inference. Participants in the *announced* condition who receive the civics lesson allocate 7.9 percentage points less credit to their representative than participants in the *secured* condition who also receive the civics lesson (95 percent confidence interval, [-12.50, -3.21]). Again, the decrease occurs because participants with context no longer infer that legislators are deserving of credit: the civics information undermines the legislator’s implication that they were influential.

The differences in credit allocation affect other assessments of the legislator. In both instances of our study, we asked our participants if they agree that their representative “works hard to bring federal money to the district.” In our Mechanical Turk sample there was only a small difference in perceptions of hard work between the announce and secure conditions when no civics information was provided. Participants in the *announced* condition were only 3.4 percentage points less likely to agree that their representative is hard working, a difference neither statistically nor substantively significant (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.14, 0.07]). But there are substantial differences in perceived effectiveness when constituents are provided contextual information from the civics lesson. When this information is provided, participants in the *announced* condition are 23.3 percentage points less likely to identify their representative as hard working (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.38, -0.08]). Our more representative survey replicates the finding. When no civics lesson is provided, we find that representatives in the *announced* condition are rated only slightly less hard working without context (3.3 percentage points, 95 percent confidence interval [-0.13, 0.06]), but when the civics lesson is provided, the representatives in the *announced*

condition are rated substantially less hard working (9.3 percentage points, 95 percent confidence interval [0.01, 0.18]).

6.3 Creating Credit Claiming Opportunities: Evidence from Fire Department Grants

Our experimental evidence shows that legislators have incentive to seek opportunities to announce expenditures in their district. Announcing gives legislators the opportunity to imply they are responsible for spending and this causes constituents to infer the representative is responsible for the expenditure. Strategic bureaucrats recognize the value that legislators attach to the announcements and create credit claiming opportunities to cultivate legislator support.

To demonstrate how bureaucrats cultivate support with announcements, we use an extended case study: we analyze the previously discussed Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFGP). Created with an appropriation in the fiscal year 2001 National Defense Authorization Act and reauthorized during the fiscal year 2005 appropriation process, the AFGP has distributed billions of dollars to fire departments. The money is allocated for the purchase of the equipment and the creation of wellness and fitness programs. Each year tens of thousands of fire departments from across the country, with a small percentage (about 13%) actually receiving awards (Kruger, 2009).

We selected the AFGP because the rules of how grants are allocated make it difficult for legislators or bureaucrats to directly influence where the grants are awarded. The process that the AFGP uses to allocate the grants affords bureaucrats few op-

opportunities to exercise discretion over who receives an award and provides few opportunities for legislators to directly intervene. The intention to insulate the grant awards from bureaucratic or legislative influence is found in the authorizing legislation, which mandates that the program allocate “grants on a competitive basis directly to fire departments of a State” (15 U.S.C. 2229 (b)(1)(A)). Each stage of the grant program—from application to final award—limits the potential for meddling. We now detail the grant allocation process—to guide our discussion of how the grants are awarded we include Figure 6.2, which describes how the grants are awarded. We created the figure using the *Code of Federal Regulations* (44 CFR Part 152) and interviews we conducted with agency officials.

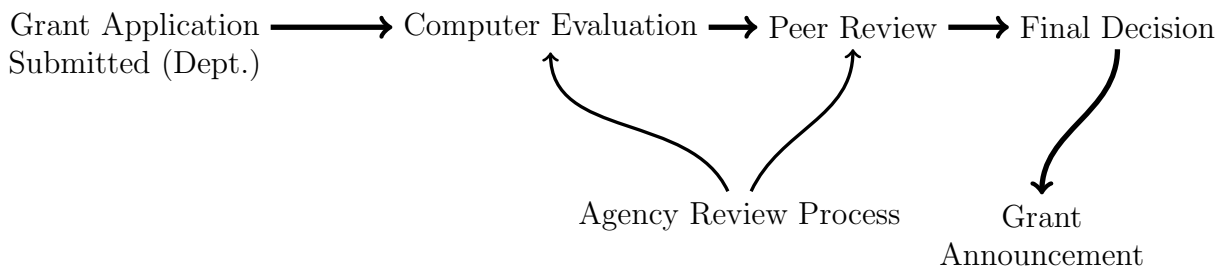


Figure 6.2: The Assistance to Firefight Grant Application Process, as described in the Code of Federal Regulations

Moving through the application process presented in Figure 6.2, it is clear that legislators are only able to exert indirect influence over how the grants are disbursed. The process begins with local fire departments, who initiate the application process by submitting an extensive application to the grant program. There are two possibilities for Congressional influence at this stage and both are indirect. Members of Congress could use their staff to assist local fire departments in the preparation of an application or a legislator may send a letter of support with an application. Representatives do

publicize the AFGP, attempt to increase the participation of fire departments, and even hold workshops to inform fire departments about the expenditures. But agency officials said that any influence over the grant allocation process is narrow and rare. In an interview, one agency official told us that Congressional offices would have to invest substantial resources to help departments because the applications are, “very specific and technical... Congressional staff wouldn’t be much help.” He also cited the need to create a “departmental narrative” that would require substantial investment from departments to write. Perhaps indicative of the lack of Congressional support are the private companies who help fire departments prepare grants. An employee of one of these companies told us that their business exists because Congressional offices are rarely able to help in the preparation of the AFGP grants. And yet another official at the agency explained that letters of support would not help much in the evaluation process. This, she explained, is because “letters from senators [or representatives] are sent to the central agency office in Washington, applications are sent to the regional offices for evaluation” (Personal Interview). The regional centers make it harder for the bureaucrats to affect the decision, because the program’s director and other top officials are stationed in Washington. Therefore, the officials who will make the final decision about grants will never see letters of support from members of Congress.

Once submitted, grant applications are sent to one of the regional evaluation centers. There, they are subjected to an initial screening that is insulated from all forms of influence (Personal Interview, 44 CFR Part 152.5). The applications are evaluated using an automated (computerized) routine, that scores the applications according to a predetermined (and publicized) criteria (44 CFR Part 152.5 (a), Personal Interview). Only those applications given a sufficiently high score from the computerized

evaluation make it to the next round. The score from the initial screening algorithm cannot be modified—the score is final. This leaves little room for strategic bureaucratic action at this stage.

After the first evaluation stage a second evaluation occurs to identify the grants that will be awarded funding. At this stage, a team of “non-Federal experts with a fire service background” (44 CFR Part 152.5 (b)) evaluate the applications. One agency official described the panel as “fire chiefs from around the [geographic] region” who score the applications after a brief training session. The score from this panel cannot be altered and is then used to determine who receives applications. The final step in the application process is the selection of departments to receive grants. Once again, there is little opportunity for bureaucratic influence. In the Code of Federal Regulations, the agency states that, “we will fund the highest scored applications before considering lower scored application”: departments are ordered according to their score and this is used to disburse the grants (44 CFR Part 152.6 (b)).

According to agency policy, officials are *technically* allowed some discretion at the final stage of this evaluation procedure (44 CFR Part 152.6 (c)). But this discretion is limited and can only be used to ensure that the applications satisfy the geographic distribution requirements that accompany the enacting statute. This states that, while the grants are to be allocated competitively, fire departments from across the country are expected to receive awards. The effect of the geographic requirement appears to be limited. One agency official was quite clear about the lack of discretion. He told us that, “we haven’t used these geographic considerations in our decisions and follow the panel scores” (Personal Interview).

While the application process provides few opportunities for either Congressional

or bureaucratic influence, the announcement stage provides ample opportunity for manipulation. After the award recipients are selected, agency officials are required to inform the departments. While the announcements are required in the CFR, there are few explicit regulations on how the announcements should occur. Indeed, they seem to be described as a formality with little policy consequence. But it is the first place in the application process where agency officials have complete discretion. In interviews, several officials told us that they recognized the opportunity that the announcement stage provided. It was the only step where they would be able to effectively increase support for their program among members of Congress.

To create the credit claiming opportunities, agency officials send the award decisions to members of Congress who are encouraged to make the award announcement before the agency. One agency official was very clear about the manipulation. She told us that, “we give the information about the grant awards to Congressional offices two or three days before the agency makes the announcement” (Personal Interview). A second agency official told us that, “we give legislators the opportunity to announce grants before the agency” (Personal Interview). Officials do this, they said, “to ensure that the legislators *remember us around appropriations time*” (emphasis added).

The evidence from qualitative interviews shows that agency officials believe that representatives value the chance to claim credit for grants. The interviews provide this important insight, but we are limited in the conclusions we can draw just from our small set of conversations with agency officials. Because we only talked to a few officials we may have had the misfortune of selecting bureaucrats who engage in an odd practice. Further, the agency officials may have provided an idealistic account of how their agency works—while they may believe they create many of these opportunities,

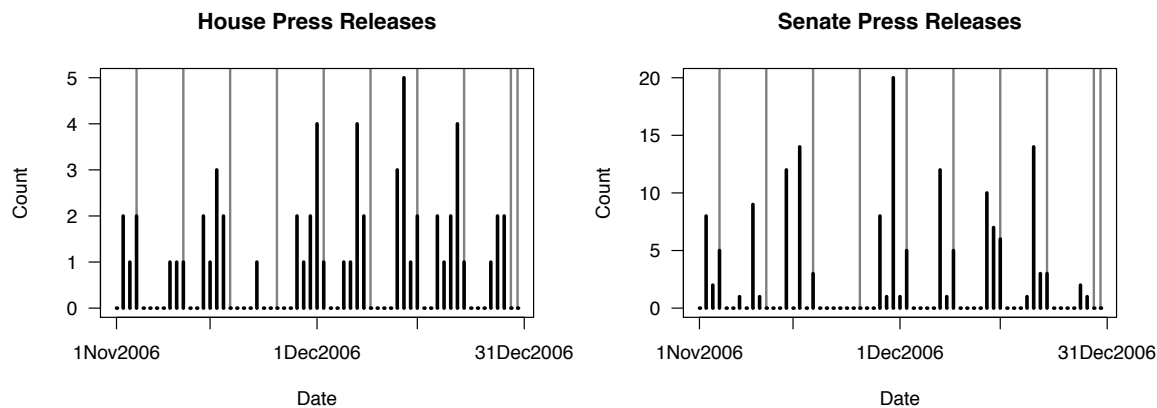
it may be because of motivated (biased) reflections.

To provide a more comprehensive test of whether agency officials are creating announcements opportunities for members of Congress, we collected data on agency announcements. Using the AFGP website, we collected a database of all grant announcements from 2005, 2006, and 2007—the three years with the most comprehensive and easily accessed announcement data. We combine data on agency grant announcements with our collection of House press releases about fire grants and a collection of Senate press releases about fire department grants (Grimmer, 2013). Together, the three data sets facilitate direct tests of whether the agency is creating credit claiming opportunities for members of Congress.

If bureaucrats are creating credit claiming opportunities for representatives in the way that the bureaucrats detailed to us in interviews, then we would expect a sharp increase in the number of press releases claiming credit for fire grants two to three days prior to the official agency release of a grant. Figure 6.3 focuses on a brief two month period at the end of 2006: from November 1st to December 31st, 2006. During this period the AFGP announced their grants on Saturday of each week and before each announcement both senators and representatives took advantage of the AFGP's announcements. For example, the AFGP announced a round of grants on November 4th (the first gray line in both the left-hand and right-hand plot in Figure 6.3. And on November 2nd and 3rd there were 10 press releases from representatives and senators announcing grants, but zero press releases announcing grants from November 5th and 6th, after the official announcement. This pattern persists over the two months: representatives announce before the agency. This is indicative of a more general pattern. A Granger Causality test shows that legislators' grant announcements tend

to occur before agency announcements.

Figure 6.3: Congressional Press Releases are Released Before Agency Press Releases



This figure shows that House and Senate press releases are released prior to the official agency announcement. This figure shows specific weeks in November and December, demonstrating that the number of press releases from representatives is highest immediately before the agency announcement date.

Figure 6.3 shows that legislators take advantage of the opportunity the bureaucrats at AFGP identified as the primary tool to cultivate support. To further demonstrate that members of Congress are announcing press releases immediately prior to the AFGP, we manually read a sample of press releases to ensure that the press releases announced grants that the agency had yet to announce. To perform the validation, we sampled 50 fire department press releases issued in the three days prior to an agency announcement. We then read each press release, identifying the grants discussed in the press release, including the fire department awarded the grant and the dollar amount. Using the announcement data we compiled from the AFGP program, we validated that the grant discussed in the press release was in fact announced one to three days later. Among the sampled press releases, *95.2 %* of the grants in the press

releases were announced one to three days prior to the AFGP announcement. The other 4.8 % announced grants were announced after the official AFGP announcement. This is direct, and strong, evidence that members of Congress are taking advantage of the AFGP’s offer of assistance.

Our case study, then, shows one method a strategic bureaucrat can use to cultivate support—manipulating the timing of press releases. By delaying an official announcement, agency officials create the opportunity for legislators to announce the expenditure. And as we have shown, the act of announcing is nearly as valuable as actually securing the grant. In the next section, we show that bureaucrats’ efforts are successful: creating credit claiming opportunities creates support for the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program.

6.4 Defending and Expanding the Grant Programs: Evidence the AFGP is Successful

Bureaucrats at the AFGP create credit claiming opportunities to bolster support among members of Congress. One reason that the bureaucrats create this support is to insulate themselves from criticism. Much of this criticism comes from right-leaning think tanks. In a series of reports The Heritage Foundation criticized the AFGP as wasteful and ineffective. In one report, the foundation concludes that the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program is “a grant program that has significant shortcomings” (Muhlhausen, 2012).

This sentiment is often echoed in conservative media. For example, The Washington Times ran a story on April 20, 2006 alleging that “fire departments are using

Homeland Security grants to buy gym equipment, sponsor puppet and clown shows, and turn first responders into fitness trainers” (Staff, 2006*b*). The article argues that the money to the local fire departments could be better spent on anti-terrorism efforts, arguing that “Congress has ignored pleas” to “redirect grant spending based on the risk of a terrorist attack” (Staff, 2006*b*).

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the program has a history of proposed cuts. For example, in his FY 2005 budget, President Bush proposed a \$250 million cut to the program—reducing funding from \$750 million to \$500 million. In response to the proposed cut, members of Congress rallied to defend the program. A group of bipartisan legislators wrote a letter to Bush “to express...deep concern over the treatment of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program in your fiscal year 2005 budget submission” (Hoyer, 2004). The legislators go on to dispute “the findings of a Program Assessment Rating Tool, that the Fire Grant program ‘is unfocused and has not been able to demonstrate its impact on public safety’” (Hoyer, 2004). The legislators were successful in rallying support and prevented \$150 million in cuts. Steny Hoyer (D-MD) added an amendment to the Homeland Security Appropriations bill to set AFGP funding at \$650 million. Another \$65 million was allocated for the related Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) grant—which was to be administered by the same bureaucrats. In total, then, the president’s attempt to cut the program’s budget by \$250 million was met with an actual cut of only \$35 million.

Attentive members of Congress again saved the program from cuts in 2011. The Obama administration requested \$670 million for AFGP and SAFER grants, but the House Appropriations committee reported a bill that included only \$350 million for

the program—a 47% decrease over Obama’s budget request (Kruger, 2013). But as Kruger (2013) explains, two amendments on the House floor successfully restored funding. One amendment, from Steve LaTourette (R-OH) and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) increased the funding of the program to \$670 million, the amount Obama requested. On the floor, Pascrell declared that “those who say that the Federal Government bears no responsibility about public safety, they are absolutely wrong. On one side of our mouth we say that we must protect and defend our first responders; on the other side of our mouth we say that we have no responsibility whatsoever in talking about our firefighters and our police officers.” A second amendment, from David Price (D-NC), allowed the grants to be used to hire laid off firefighters—a major use of previous grants.

The floor votes provide an opportunity to see who voted to defend the AFGP when its funding was threatened. Table 6.2 regresses votes on both amendments on either a measure of legislators’ credit claiming rate (Column 1) or the proportion of press releases claiming credit for fire department grants (Column 2). To ensure that our conclusions are not based on obvious confounding factors we include whether a representative is a Democrat and their DW-Nominate score, a measure of legislators’ previous roll call history that corresponds roughly to her ideological orientation (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997). Because we are collecting the two votes into a single model, we include an indicator for each amendment and also legislator random effects (Gelman and Hill, 2007).

Table 6.2 shows that representatives who claim credit for spending, and crucially, fire department grants, are the most likely to vote to increase funding for the program. A shift from the 10th percentile of proportion of press releases allocated to credit

Table 6.2: Legislators who Claim Credit for Fire Grants Vote to Restore Agency Funding

Covariate	Overall	Fire Grant
Intercept	0.94 (0.07)	0.91 (0.07)
Prop. Credit Claiming	0.28 (0.14)	- -
Prop. Fire Grants	- -	1.02 (0.48)
Democrat	-0.21 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.11)
Ideal Point	-0.65 (0.10)	-0.43 (0.10)
Waiver Amendment	-0.13 (0.02)	-0.10 (0.02)
Rep. Random Effects	Yes	Yes

This table shows that representatives who take advantage of opportunities to claim credit for fire grant expenditures vote to increase funding on the House floor. It appears, then, that bureaucrats' efforts to build support are successful.

claiming to the 90th percentile increases a legislators' probability of voting to increase AFGP funding 8.7 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval, [0.01, 0.17]). Likewise, a similar shift in proportion of press releases allocated to claiming credit for fire department grants increases the probability of support the AFGP amendments 4.1 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval, [0.00, 0.08]).

This provides evidence that the AFGP has cultivated Congressional support, simply through the creation of credit claiming opportunities. And as fiscal battles in Washington continue, the program continues to receive support from representatives. For example, Aaron Schock (R-IL), who allocates about 12.7% of his press releases to claiming credit for fire grants, introduced an amendment to restore funding for

the AFGP in a continuing resolution (a bill to continue funding the federal government without an Appropriations bill). After the amendment passed, Schock (R-IL) declared that “these grants provide vital funding to the nation’s first responders to help adequately staff firehouses and to provide the necessary specialized equipment to protect those that put themselves in harm’s way” (Schock, 2012). The grants do help recipient fire departments prepare for fires in the town, but they also help legislators cultivate support with constituents.

While we have focused on a single program, the bureaucratic strategy for cultivating support with members of Congress is implemented across many federal agencies. Indeed, several agencies put the policy in publicly available writing. For example, when announcing Head Start grant recipients the Department of Health & Human Services’ (HHS) policy is that

“The Congressional Liaison Office (CLO) relays information on ACF [Administration of Children and Families] awards to the senators and representatives in whose states and districts the projects are awarded. The responsible grants office will provide a copy of the FAA to the CLO and allows the CLO a 72-hour waiting period to notify the appropriate congressional delegation. The FAA will not be mailed to the grantee agency until the waiting period has expired” (Staff, 2013)

This is indicative of a more general HHS policy, which states that “generally, a 72-hour waiting period will be required between CLO [Congressional Liaison Office] notification and mailing the NGA [Notification of Grant Award]” (Staff, 1999). Similarly, in meeting minutes posted from an National Institute of Health (NIH) board meeting, a board member “reminded the group that a 72-hour waiting period

is required between CLO [Congressional Liason Office] notification and mailing the Notification of Grant Award (NGA). He asked group members to ensure that everyone...is following this policy and releasing the NGA in the proper amount of time” (Staff, 2003). The seemingly narrow focus of our study identifies a more general relationship between legislators and bureaucrats.

6.5 Conclusion: Deceiving Constituents to Defend a Program

This chapter has shown how the credit claiming, credit allocation process shapes the way the federal government spends money. The mere opportunity to claim credit makes possible grant programs that might be otherwise politically vulnerable. Bureaucrats give members of Congress the opportunity to claim credit for agency grant decisions and members of Congress take advantage, regularly announcing new expenditures. Even though legislators never literally claim credit for the spending, merely announcing expenditures leads constituents tend to infer that legislators are responsible for expenditures. The inference occurs, in part, because of psychological processes that lead to constituents identifying a causal relationship—even when the relationship is only implied and never explicitly stated. This makes merely announcing an expenditure valuable to legislators, because it gives them the opportunity to imply they are responsible for an expenditure. And legislators appear to repay bureaucrats for the chance to announce grants, with legislators who regularly announce grants also supporting the program when it is threatened.

When bureaucrats funnel announcements to legislative offices they affect Congres-

sional representation, though in subtle ways. We may be worried that bureaucrats are facilitating deception (Mansbridge, 2003). Legislators' announcements, created with the help of bureaucrats, may lead constituents to believe something that legislators know to be untrue, or at least partly untrue. The potential deception we identify in this chapter is closely related to other concepts in ethics and political science. Arthur Applbaum, for example, describes *redescription*—the act of describing something again “to bypass certain evaluative and prescriptive questions” (Applbaum, 1999, 92). In a study of lying in international politics, John Mearsheimer identifies *spinning* as “when a person telling a story emphasizes certain facts and links them together in ways that play to his advantage, while, at the same time, downplaying or ignoring inconvenient facts” (Mearsheimer, 2011, 16). And without politicians having the same overriding intent to mislead constituents, Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro describe how politicians use *crafted talk* to influence public opinion (Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000).

While subtle, legislators are deceiving constituents when they announce expenditures they had only an indirect role in securing. Of course, we might say that legislators are not deceiving constituents at all. We might say legislators deserve credit because Congress does continue to authorize expenditures for the program and then appropriate funds for the grant program to continue. Even when legislators vote against increasing funding to the agency, they still might correctly say they support the existence of the program by supporting a budget that funds the grant program and therefore legislators are supporting the program that ultimately leads to the expenditure in the district. Legislators are helping the program, but it is a very limited sort of help: it is passive, requires little effort, and changing the actions of a single

legislator is unlikely to affect the fate of a grant directed to a district. Contrast this with the effort legislators dedicate to earmarking or other methods of directly intervening in the expenditure process. This requires legislators to actively pursue funds, requires more direct effort, and in many instances the earmark causes the expenditure to occur—without the earmark the project may never occur. Even if legislators deserve some credit for the grant expenditure, their language is causing constituents to allocate credit as if legislators had secured the money through earmarking. And our experiments show that constituents would not allocate this credit if they had more information about how the grant was secured. By implying they deserve credit, legislators are deceiving their constituents.

How troubling we find this deception, though, depends on our standards for representation. A Kantian view of ethics would condemn the deception as corrosive to the standards necessary for legitimate representation. Immanuel Kant advocated an absolutist view of truth telling—asserting it is always inappropriate to deceive or lie to an interlocutor. Christine Korsgaard summarizes the Kantian logic, “we must tell the truth so others may reason freely...in telling them the truth, we are inviting them to reason together with us, to share in our deliberations” (Korsgaard, 1997, xxiii). Rather than deceive constituents to receive credit, a Kantian view would ask that legislators explain more carefully their role in the process, but explain why constituents should reward their legislator nonetheless. Deception also troubles deliberative democrats as inappropriate for legislators (Mansbridge, 2003). Jane Mansbridge identifies such actions as manipulation—an action that undermines the justification for legislators’ prominent place in political debate (Mansbridge, 2003). And deception is antithetical to the reason giving requirement at the center of most normative

theories of deliberative democracy (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996).

If we examine the deception as consequentialists, however, we may find the deception justifiable—constituents may prefer that their legislator continue to deceive them about their role in securing the expenditure. This preference arises because deception may lead to more efficient allocations of projects. A large literature has examined how political factors can affect the districts that receive expenditures (Ferejohn, 1974; Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen, 1981; Berry, Burden and Howell, 2010*b*). If our only goal is to allocate funding to the objectively most economically efficient projects then the political influence induces inefficiencies in the projects that are allocated (Ferejohn, 1974) and even budget overruns (Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen, 1981; Chen and Malhotra, 2007). Competitive grant programs are an institutional innovation that is intended to limit the role of political influence in the allocation of grants. Rather than allocating expenditures by who has the greatest political power, a competitive process directs spending to the projects most deserving of the expenditure. The focus on objective, rather than political, considerations may, however, undermine support for the grant program. When allocating grants competitively, influential legislators lose the ability to direct funds to their district.

When bureaucrats create credit claiming opportunities for legislators they solve this institutional design problem, creating political support for a program that allocates expenditures through an explicitly non-political process. The credit claiming opportunities build support with legislators, who continue to support the program because it provides them with the opportunity to regularly claim credit for popular expenditures with little effort exerted. Bureaucrats continue to create the credit claiming opportunities for legislators to sustain their program. The result is that a

program that allocates expenditures using more criteria that will likely lead to more efficient allocations of money also has the support necessary to sustain the efficient expenditures.

A consequentialist justification for an expenditure is that it helps sustain the competitive grant process institution, which constituents prefer to a more political allocation. Of course there are many potential objections to this conclusion. Perhaps one of the most salient objections is that the deception is still self-serving for legislators and the use of consequentialist or utilitarian logic does not preclude the application of more absolutist ethical standards (Kymlicka, 2002). For example, we might suspect that this deception, if systematically revealed and explained to constituents, could further undermine trust in government. When considering even more morally troubling situations, Michael Walzer has advocated that legislators atone for their misdeeds in public after the deception or other morally dubious action has concluded (Walzer, 1973). This is not an option available for legislators making use of the fire grants, because revealing the deception would undermine the entire point. So to sustain the competitive grant institution, we must tolerate legislators receiving credit for projects they had only an indirect role in securing.

The credit claiming, credit allocation process complicates the process of representation around spending. It can create policy benefits, but also undermine how legislators communicate with constituents. When describing this process thus far, we have focused on how legislators use rhetoric around spending to build constituent support. In the next chapter we examine how opponents can use criticism to undermine legislators' credit and how this helps to explain the large decrease in Republican credit claiming rates that we documented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 7

Criticism and Credit: How Deficit Implications Undermine Credit Allocation

On February 17th, 2009 in Denver Colorado, Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—a large scale infusion of “stimulus” cash into the American economy—into law. At the ceremony, Obama declared that “The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that I will sign today...is the most sweeping economic recovery package in our history”. The massive stimulus spending was an attempt to stop the massive layoffs after the fiscal crises of late 2008, to allay growing fears about the economy, and to cease the momentum of the foreclosure crisis. As the law was signed, unemployment was rapidly increasing—jumping from 6.8% when Obama was elected in November to 8.3% in February. Keeping close pace with the rising unemployment was public anxiety about the economy. Consumer confidence was plummeted from 61.4 in September 2008 to 25.3 in February 2009. And as home

prices tumbled, it was estimated that 1.8% of homeowners had received at least one notice that foreclosure proceedings on their home had begun (Staff, 2009*b*).

Obama promised at the ceremony that “[t]oday does not mark the end of our economic troubles. Nor does it constitute all of what we must do to turn our economy around. But it does mark the beginning of the end.” He had good reason to be optimistic. The stimulus injected a massive amount of cash into the stagnant economy—\$787 billion in total. While liberal economists warned the spending was too little, the scope of the cash infusion was impressive. Consider just transportation spending—constituting \$48.1 billion total—including \$27.5 billion for the construction and maintenance of highways. The stimulus also included money to bolster energy, waste, and communication infrastructure. With only slight exaggeration, Obama declared that “we are remaking the American landscape with the largest new investment in our nation’s infrastructure since Eisenhower built an interstate highway system in the 1950s.”

The stimulus spending also included a modest program to stop home foreclosures before they began. The “Home Affordable Modification Program” provided incentives to loan companies to revise the terms of mortgages of home owners who may face foreclosure in the future, but have yet to miss a payment. The relatively small expenditure was intended to avoid the substantially more costly—to both governments and citizens—process of foreclosing homes.

This small and seemingly uncontroversial foreclosure prevention program catalyzed one of the largest—and most impactful—social movements in recent American political history. Two days after Obama signed the Recovery Act into law, CNBC reporter Rick Santelli crystallized conservative frustration with the Keynesian stimulus

spending. Santelli, while participating in a seemingly mundane discussion about the mortgage assistance program while reporting from the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, declared that “the government is promoting bad behavior.” He goes on to ask “if we really want to subsidize the losers’ mortgages?” or if instead the government should “buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people who might have a chance to actually prosper down the road.” The exchange traders accompanying Santelli joined. While Santelli was speaking a trader burst onto screen and shouted “how about we all stop paying our mortgage?” Near the end of the rant, Santelli declared that “we’re thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I’m going to start organizing.”

Long before July, Santelli’s Tea Party movement was beginning (Skocpol and Williamson, 2011). On April 15th Tea Party groups across the country held well attended rallies, with prominent news coverage broadcasting the message even further (Skocpol and Williamson, 2011). At one rally a protester, Mary Wojnas, told a CNN reporter that “our government’s out of control with spending” (Cooper et al., 2009). A Tea Party protester in Sacramento declared that she rallied “to oppose socialism and anyone who supports it.” At the same rally, a protester carried a sign declaring that “my piggy bank ain’t your pork barrel”.

After the April 15th rallies, Tea Party groups continued to be a presence in American politics. During the summer of 2009, as Congress was crafting the Affordable Care Act—popularly known as Obamacare—Tea Party members railed against a perceived government take-over of the health care system. Particularly offensive to the Tea Party members was the particularistic spending used to win the support of moderate Democrats in the Senate. The Tea Party members lambasted the “Cornhusker

Kickback”—which funded Nebraska Medicaid recipients in exchange for Ben Nelson’s (D-NE) support—and the “Louisiana Purchase”—which provided \$200 million in Medicaid funds for Louisiana to win Mary Landrieu’s vote as unjust “bribes” used to obtain “cloture on the government health care takeover” (Malkin, 2009).

The Tea Party’s anger was focused on the types of particularistic spending that we have shown legislators use to build support. And it is this criticism that undermined support for legislators. The Tea Party movement—and conservative political pundits—broadcasted criticism about government spending, often citing the sorts of projects legislators regularly claim credit for obtaining. As the Tea Party movement rose in prominence, Republicans changed how they talked about spending. Not only did Republicans substantially reduce their credit claiming propensity in 2009 and 2010, as we document in Chapter 3. Republicans also increased and amplified their criticism of government spending—particularly Republican representatives from districts with a large concentration of Republicans, where the Tea Party was particularly strong.

This criticism is important for understanding credit allocation, because it causes constituents to consider the potentially negative budget consequences of particularistic spending in the district. Constituents, as we have shown in the previous chapters, think intuitively when evaluating legislators’ credit claiming statements and allocating credit. This means that the public can simultaneously hold contradictory preferences. Constituents not only have a preference for spending in their district, they also prefer to eliminate budget deficits and lower the national debt (Hansen, 1998). Spending criticism reminds constituents of their preferences for reduced overall spending and this directly affects the credit legislators receive from claiming credit for particularistic

spending. Deficit criticism causes constituents to punish legislators who they would otherwise reward. Using a pair of experiments, we show that providing budgetary information about otherwise popular expenditures negates the positive credit legislators receive for the expenditure. Instead, decreases approval ratings, thermometer scores, and perceptions of fiscal responsibility. And the budgetary information also undermines overall support for government spending in the district.

Our experimental evidence coupled with our analysis of Congressional rhetoric helps explain how the Tea Party rhetoric diminished the personal vote-building effect of the stimulus spending. While constituents normally do not consider the budget implications of spending (Hansen, 1998), the Tea Party rhetoric raised the salience of the deficit spending that supported the stimulus, a message regularly reiterated in sympathetic media coverage. The rhetoric caused constituents to identify spending as an example of the type of “pork barrel project” that Tea Party activists and television hosts assured the public was ruining the federal budget (Skocpol and Williamson, 2011). We show that the criticism was particularly effective among constituents who likely hold preferences for a reduced budget (Zaller, 1992): criticism reduced support for spending among all citizens, but *strong liberals* who actually *increased* support for legislators in response to the budget criticism. The criticism also affected how constituents evaluated their representative’s actual credit claiming behavior. Without criticism there is a positive relationship between a legislators’ actual credit claiming rates and constituents’ perceptions of their actual representatives’ ability to deliver money to the district. But when we introduce criticism of government expenditures this relationship is reversed—legislators who claim credit at a higher rate are viewed more negatively overall and as less effective advocates for their constituents. Criticism

of spending, then, is an effective strategy for undermining legislators' credit claiming efforts and for attacking legislators' impression of influence.

The pervasive budget criticism undermines the value of credit claiming for constituents. And so to, we believe, does this criticism dampen the value of particularistic spending for creating consensus in legislative institutions. Both political scientists (Evans, 2004; Frisch and Kelly, 2011) and politicians have argued that legislative earmarks are often instrumental in assembling legislative coalitions, but political pressure from transparency and conservative groups have led to bans on earmarked funds in appropriations bills. Some observers have argued that the bans make forming legislative coalitions more difficult to form. They are that removing the ban could help solve some of the legislative paralysis that led to brinksmanship over the debt ceiling in 2011 and 2013 and a government shutdown in the fall of 2013. Our evidence shows, however, that earmarks alone are likely insufficient for overcoming the legislative divisiveness that plagues current congresses. This is because the budget criticism causes legislators to place lower value on the credit claiming opportunities that earmarks provide. For particularistic spending to again “grease the wheels” of the legislative process, a change in rhetoric must also accompany the ability to earmark funds.

The evidence we present in this chapter demonstrates how legislators' statements—credit claiming and criticism—affect the credit legislators receive for spending. We begin with an examination of how Republicans adopted anti-spending language as the Tea Party rose to prominence. To show this, we start with Zach Wamp—a Tennessee Republican who converted from appropriator to deficit hawk.

7.1 The Decline of Republican Credit Claiming and the Rise of Tea Party Rhetoric

Before the Tea Party's rise in the Republican party, Zach Wamp (R-TN) was a powerful appropriator who used his position on the Appropriations committee to direct spending and projects to his East Tennessee district. After joining the Appropriations committee in 1997, Wamp regularly claimed credit for spending and spending in his district. For example, in 1998 Wamp claimed credit for an \$8 million education grant, stating that the grant "should mean better teaching, more challenging courses and a much more creative learning environment for thousands of Hamilton County students" (Press, 1998). In 2000, Wamp claimed credit for a \$1 million dollar earmark to improve water in his district, because Wamp said "in the foothills of Appalachia there are still people that are without the basic necessities" (Press, 2000) and in 2001 he pushed for funds to improve Tennessee tourism. One news story—that looks suspiciously like a press release—describes a "\$1.2 million funding package moving through Congress" to promote tourism—a proposal sponsored by Wamp (Press, 2001).

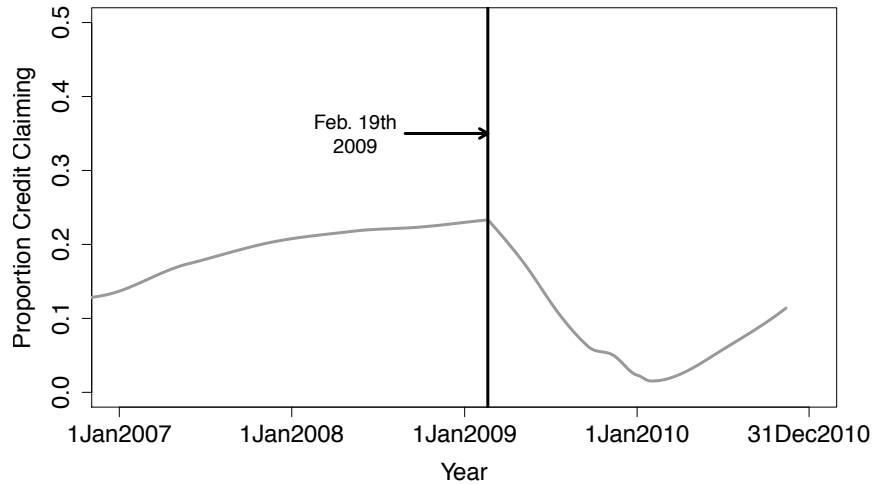
Wamp's prowess in securing money continued throughout the 2000's—becoming an integral component of how he defined his tenure in Washington to constituents. In one profile he described himself as "a heat-seeking missile on behalf of Tennessee and my district" (STAFF, 2010*c*). Wamp even defended his efforts against anti-spending criticism. The Citizens Against Government Waste issued a report in 2003 that was critical of an increase in pork barrel spending in Tennessee. Tom Schatz, then president of the group, criticized appropriators like Wamp—asking them to "look in the mirror and decide whether your parochial pork project is really more important

than protecting the United States of America” (Press, 2003). Wamp struck back sharply at Schatz’s rhetoric. Wamp made clear that he had “no hesitancy to tell you that I regularly look myself in the mirror, and I’m very proud of the work we’re doing on the House Appropriations Committee for our state, our region and our nation” (Press, 2003).

With Wamp’s considerable power in Tennessee—based in part on his well cultivated impression of influence over the appropriations process—he declared his candidacy for governor on January 5th, 2009 (Press, 2009). Yet, with the rise of the Tea Party, it became clear that Wamp would have to distance himself from his particularistic past. Part of this distancing was a dramatic shift in his credit claiming propensity. Figure 7.1 shows Wamp’s propensity of credit claiming in the two years prior to the Tea Party movement—2007 and 2008—and the two years after—2009 and 2010. The gray-lines are estimates of the daily probability of an issued press release claiming credit for money and the thick black line represents February 19th—the day of Santelli’s rant. In 2007 and 2008, Wamp allocated a large share of his press releases to claiming credit—about 19% of his press releases immediately before the Tea Party. But after the Tea Party emerges Wamp abandons credit claiming, decreasing his credit claiming propensity by 11 percentage points.

Wamp’s sharp decline in credit claiming propensity reflects Republicans’ broader movement away from credit claiming that we documented in Chapter 3—in response to the Tea Party, Republicans abandoned credit claiming as a strategy to cultivate support. But Wamp, like other Republicans, went further and became a harsh critic of particularistic spending. Wamp, who defended particularistic spending in Tennessee from the Citizens and Government Waste, adopted Tea Party language to criticize

Figure 7.1: Zach Wamp (R-TN) and the Abandoning of Credit Claiming



This figure shows that after the Santelli Tea Party rant, Zach Wamp abandoned his credit claiming focused strategy.

spending and actively avoided being associated with spending projects in his district. For example, on December 12, 2009 Wamp issued a press release titled “Mall Energy Project Funded Without Congressional Help.” In the release, Wamp declared that, “Core Properties, owner of the Oak Ridge mall, did not request congressional help on its competitive grant from the U.S. Department of Energy. Congressman Zach Wamp did not play any role in this grant” (Wamp, 2009).

Wamp’s adoption of Tea Party rhetoric went even further than merely distancing himself from spending in the district. Wamp suggested that the intrusive federal government and taxes may warrant secession. In one interview, Wamp expressed “hope that the American people will go to the ballot box in 2010 and 2012 so that states are not forced to consider separation from this government” (Kolawole, 2010).

Wamp’s shift—from avid appropriator to spending critic—reflects a broader shift

in the Republican party. In Chapter 3, we documented the decline in credit claiming propensity—with Republicans reducing their credit claiming over 13 percentage points after the Tea Party’s rise. As Chapter 3 showed, Republican credit claiming rates were declining before the Tea Party movement—a decline that paralleled anti-spending rhetoric in the McCain campaign and conservative concerns about budget deficits during the Bush administration. But the decline in credit claiming rate was hastened after Obama was elected and Santelli’s rant crystallized conservative objections to stimulus spending. Before February 19th, 2009 the daily rate of Republican credit claiming was declining by about 0.6 percentage points every 3 months. After February 19th, Republicans decreased their daily credit claiming rate by 1.1 percentage points every 3 months—nearly doubling the rate of decline.

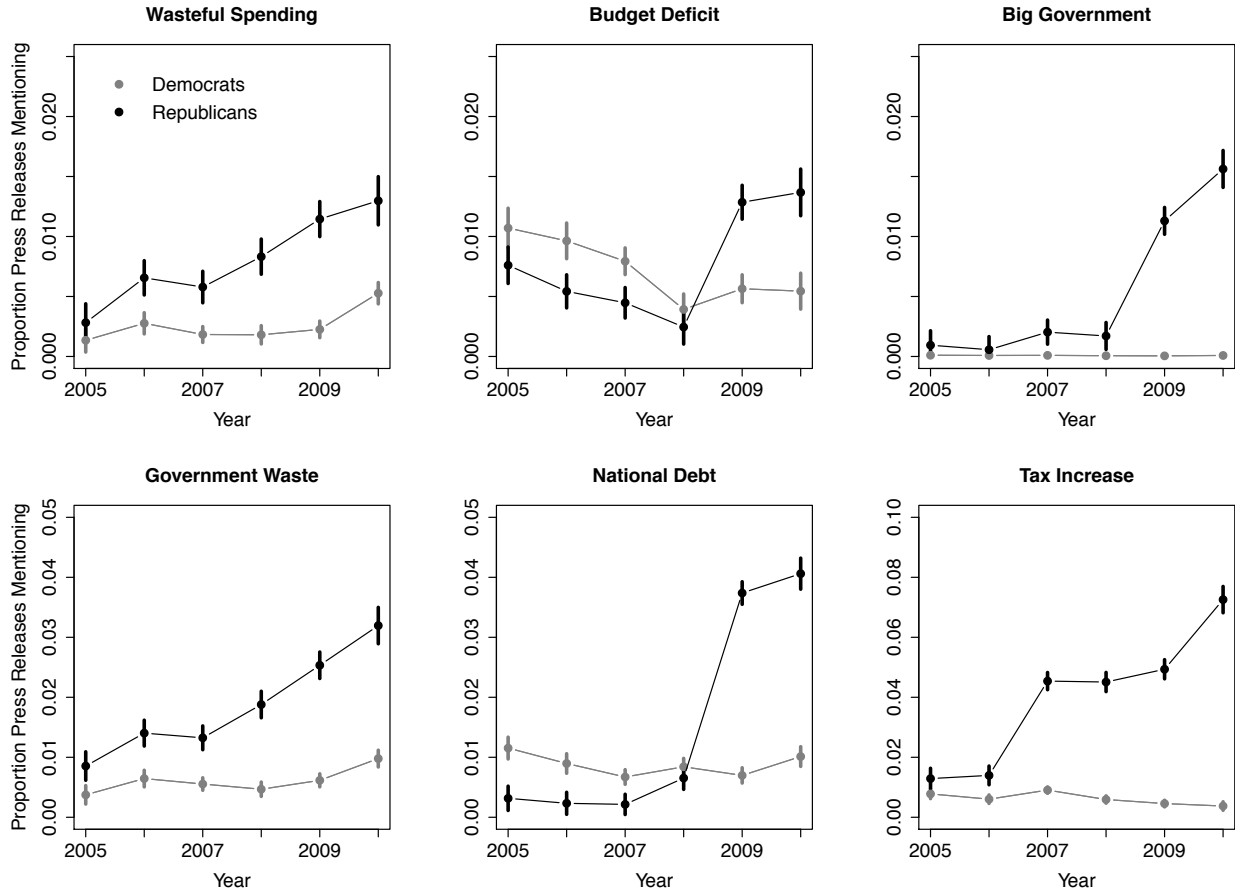
While Republicans—like Zach Wamp—were avoiding credit claiming, they became increasingly vocal critics of federal spending: Republicans adopted the language of the Tea Party activists. Figure 7.2 shows the incidence of six examples of anti-spending rhetoric over the 6 years of press releases included in this study. Each plot represents the proportion of times a particular term appears in press releases (vertical axis) over the six years of study (horizontal axis) for Democrats (gray-line) and Republicans (black-line).

As an illustrative example, consider the plot in the top-right corner. This shows the proportion of press releases from each party that make use of the term “big government.” Big government has a long history of being used a pejorative description of an expanding federal bureaucracy by both Democrats and Republicans. Ronald Reagan famously quipped that “you can’t be for *big government*, big taxes, and big bureaucracy and still be for the little guy” (emphasis added). And Bill Clinton de-

clared in his 1996 State of the Union Address that “the era of *big government* is over” (emphasis added). Anger against “big government” became a regular component of Tea Party rhetoric. At an appearance early in the movement, former House majority leader Dick Armey declared that “we oppose bailouts, *big government*, and bad economic policy that threatens the health of the economy” (Armey 2009, emphasis added). A Washington Times editorial on July 4th, 2009 declared that the “popular uprising against oppressive *big government* is in the best tradition of the American independence movement” (Editorial 2009, emphasis added). And one Tea Party protester in Pittsburgh summarized the purpose of a Tax day rally when he declared that “It’s an anti-*big government* rally” (Conte, 2009).

The top-right plot in Figure 7.2 shows the explosion in Republican use of the phrase “big government” after 2009. Before Obama’s election, before 2009 the phrase big government was rarely used in press releases: the phrase appeared in only 0.07% of press releases. After Obama’s election, the use of “big government” among Republicans increases substantially. By 2010, over 1.5% of Republican press releases refer to big government. This included Republicans like John Culberson (R-TX) declaring that “It is clear that his [Obama’s] reckless spending and big government policies have failed” (Culberson, 2009). John Sullivan (R-OK) reacted to Obama’s State of the Union address by stating that “the American people are fed up with what is going on in Washington - they are not buying the tax, borrow and spend big government solutions that the President, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid are selling” (Sullivan, 2010). And Bill Shuster (R-PA) criticized the stimulus as “a near trillion dollar grab-bag of big government social spending and pet projects from the political left” (Shuster, 2010). There is no similar increase for Democrats—the increase in the

Figure 7.2: The Rise of Anti-Spending Rhetoric

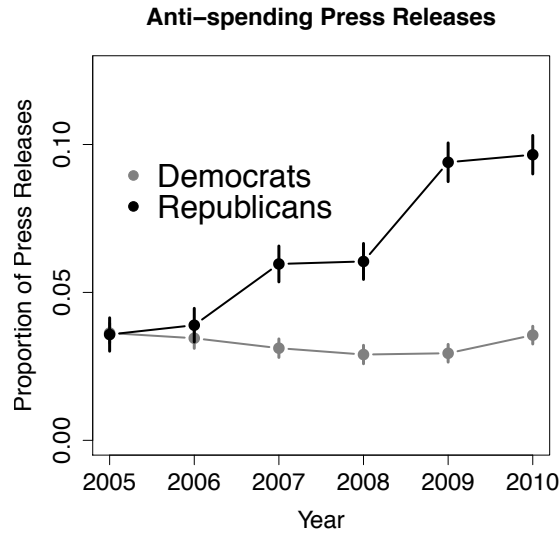


This figure shows the rise of anti spending, or tea party, rhetoric among Republicans. The plot shows the proportion of House press releases particular key words appear, in each year (horizontal axis), from Democrats (grey-line) and Republicans (black line). The points are the measures of proportions, the thick lines are 95 percent confidence intervals. There is a rise in the proportion of press releases from Republicans that use the key words, indicative of the general rise of anti-spending rhetoric.

use of the phrase “big government” is exclusive to Republicans.

Other anti-spending phrases saw a similar increase after Obama’s election. For example, Republicans became more likely than Democrats to use the phrase “National Debt” —displayed in the center-bottom panel of Figure 7.2—after Obama’s election.

Figure 7.3: The Rise of Anti-Spending Rhetoric among Republicans



This figure shows how Republicans allocated a much larger share of their press releases to anti-spending rhetoric than Democrats, with a large increase after Obama is elected.

Republicans also became more likely to discuss the “budget deficit” and “tax increases.” Republicans clearly adopted the language of the Tea Party after Obama’s election, while Democrats avoided the anti-spending rhetoric.

We aggregate the incidence of the six spending phrases in Figure 7.2 to create an anti-spending rhetoric index. We first record whether any of the six phrases in Figure 7.2—determined using Tea Party manifestos and websites—occur in legislators’ press releases. We then measure the proportion of press releases for each legislator that the anti-spending rhetoric occurs. To create a final measure, we use a multilevel model to smooth this proportion, borrowing information when legislators issue only a few press releases (Gelman and Hill, 2007).

Our measure of anti-spending rhetoric has a great deal of face validity—even

though it is not based on a formal coding scheme and is built on only a small set of anti-spending phrases. The highest rate of anti-spending rhetoric is from Virginia Foxx (R-NC). The National Journal ranks Foxx as the most conservative member of Congress and is a well known vocal critic of President Obama's policies and Democrats in general. Other vocal members of the Tea Party caucus—including Ander Crenshaw (R-FL), John Kline (R-MN), Pete Sessions (R-TX), and John Culberson (R-TX)—all are among the representatives with the highest rate of anti-spending rhetoric in their press releases. Overall, Republicans in 2009 and 2010 have anti-spending rhetoric in about 9.5% of their press releases. But Democrats, who had substantially less incentive to criticize spending than Republicans, have anti-spending rhetoric in only 3.2% of their press releases.

Figure 7.3 shows the Republican explosion in anti-spending rhetoric. This increase occurs in two major shifts. The first occurs after the Democrats win the majority in the House of Representatives the remaining Republicans begin to be more critical of spending—increasing the proportion of anti-spending press releases 2.1 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval [0.01,0.03]). The biggest increase, however, occurs after Barack Obama is elected. In 2008 Republicans had an anti-spending phrase in about 6% of their press releases, but in 2009 Republicans allocated 9.3% of their press releases to anti-spending rhetoric a substantial 3.3 percentage point increase (95 percent confidence interval [0.02, 0.04]).

The adoption of the Tea Party rhetoric appears to be a response, in part, to Republican incumbents inoculating themselves from potential primary challengers (Mayhew, 1974; Brady, Han and Pope, 2007). We demonstrated in Chapter 3 that Republicans from the most conservative districts decreased their attention to credit

claiming more than Republicans from more moderate districts. Republicans from conservative districts—those most likely to have Tea Party activists—had the largest increases in anti-spending rhetoric. Republicans from districts where McCain received 65% of the two-party vote in the 2008 presidential election increased the allocation of their press releases to anti-spending rhetoric 1.6 percentage points more than Republicans from districts where McCain received 55% of the two party vote (95 percent confidence interval [0.01, 0.3]).

When Republicans lob the anti-spending critiques, they are attacking a major Obama administration policy goal. But they are also directly undermining the electoral benefit of the stimulus spending for all members of Congress. Perhaps no attack was more direct on the ability to claim credit for spending than Republican efforts to eliminate funds for signs that mark stimulus projects. Ander Crenshaw issued a press release representative of the attack. In Crenshaw's press release he explained that he "voted to save American taxpayers millions of dollars by eliminating federal funding for signage that promotes the Obama Administration's stimulus bill." He went on to explain that "across the country, signs have been erected to alert citizens that certain projects are being funded by last year's stimulus bill. These signs, often along highways, provide no meaningful information, create no jobs, and have been criticized as taxpayer-funded advertisements for the stimulus bill" (Crenshaw, 2010). He concludes with a case against the stimulus, stating that "Americans are sick and tired of Washington's spending spree and are calling for an end to big government spending" (Crenshaw, 2010).

Other Republicans set out to explicitly undermine the content of the spending package. Ed Royce (R-CA) leveled criticism when the stimulus package was proposed.

He stated that:

Americans around our nation are suffering. They deserve legislation that spurs investment and creates jobs back home. Instead I have to tell my constituents that the Democrat Leadership decided the solution to this crisis included giving billions to ACORN, a special interest group that has been accused of voter fraud and is reportedly under federal investigation...What started out as an economic stimulus bill turned into an omnibus spending spree (Royce, 2009).

Republicans encouraged constituents to join in the criticism, inviting them to identify spending programs worthy of cutting. As Howard Coble (R-NC) explained “House Republican Whip Eric Cantor launched YouCut one week ago and invited viewers to vote on one of five spending cuts that Republicans would bring to the House floor for an up or down vote each week. More than 280,000 people voted in just the first week” (Coble, 2010). While some criticized the YouCut program as frivolous, it provided Republicans with the opportunity to identify individual projects and criticize the expenditures.

Republican criticism of the stimulus affected how the spending package was covered, ensuring that legislators’ credit claiming efforts were coupled with criticism of the spending. For example, one report touted that Charlie Melancon’s (D-LA) district in Louisiana would receive “more than \$5 billion over three years” (Deslatte, 2009). But Bill Cassidy (R-LA) criticized the spending, stating that “A better bill would focus on providing tax relief for working families and small businesses and strengthening our infrastructure...This is the vision originally laid out by President Obama, and this is the kind of package I could potentially support. Unfortunately, that vision

has been weighed down with irresponsible and ineffective spending” (Deslatte, 2009).

Chet Edwards’ (D-TX) opponent in the 2010 Congressional election expressed a similar sentiment. Edwards was a long time representative of a Republican leaning district—in part because of his ability to secure money and claim credit for it in the district. As one newspaper report summarizes, “political experts have credited Edwards’ sustained political success in a district that is heavily Republican in part to his ability to bring in federal pork” (Benning, 2010). That same article—which covered Edwards’ claiming credit for a \$16.5 million earmark for Fort Hood—also explained why that was increasingly difficult. The article argued that Edwards’ Republican challenger, Bill Flores, “has dinged Edwards for being a big spender in a conservative-leaning district,” explicitly arguing that the expenditures that Edwards was securing was contributing to the national debt (Benning, 2010). Jeb Hensarling (R-TX) expressed a similar sentiment when stumping for Flores. Hensarling argued that “Obama, Pelosi and Edwards have put the nation on the road to bankruptcy, and they’re pressing on the pedal. They’re spending us into oblivion at a time when tax revenues are down because the economy is on its back” (Smith, 2010). The Tea Party’s criticism, then, directly undermined Edwards’ primary strength: the impression of influence over expenditures that he had cultivated with his constituents.

The Republican party’s budget rhetoric coincided with an increasing awareness of the budget deficit among Americans. By the midterm elections in November 2010, 9% of voters identified the budget deficit as the most important problem facing America—up from nearly 0% throughout the Bush administration (Newport, 2010). When prompted, voters were more united in their expression of budget concerns. In March 2010, Gallup asked the voters to rate the importance of a series of issues for the

2010 Congressional elections. When asked, 45% of respondents identified the federal budget deficit as extremely important for their vote. The concern for the deficit extended beyond Republicans. The budget deficit was the second most important issue for *independents* with 52% identifying the deficit as extremely important for their vote (Jones, 2010).

The Tea Party movement created public opposition to spending projects, raised the salience of budget concerns, and undermined legislators' credit claiming efforts. This criticism, we show in the next section, undermines support for spending projects and causes constituents to revise how they view their legislators' credit claiming efforts.

7.2 Study 1: Rewarded for Spending, Punished for Deficits

To examine how Tea Party-style budget criticism affects constituent credit allocation, we conducted a pair of experiments. While voters often have little reason or incentive to connect expenditures in the district to broader budget concerns (Hansen, 1998), political elites—like the Tea Party rhetoric we examined in the previous section—can make the connection explicit and undermine legislators' credit claiming effort. A robust public opinion literature shows that this kind of contrasting information will affect constituent evaluations (Zaller, 1992). But, as we will show, our experiments will allow us to assess who is responsive to the criticism and how this has a broader effect on evaluations of legislators.

Our first experiment examines the effect of budget criticism from a non-partisan

source—the Congressional Budget Office. This allows us to isolate the effect of the information, separate from any partisan signals that may occur as party officials attack a legislator. For this experiment, we recruited a census-matched sample of 702 self-identified partisans from the SSI panel. We told participants that we had identified a recently written newspaper article about their actual representative in the House and then provided the participant with the experimental manipulation. The use of the actual representative and newspaper stories increases the ecological validity of our treatment, while also ensuring our participants do not easily identify our manipulation.

Our experiment provides participants with one of two versions of the article, which we summarize in Table 7.1. The *credit claiming* condition presents participants with a legislator claiming credit for an \$84 million highway expenditure in the district. To customize the paragraph about each participant’s legislator, we include the representative’s name at |representativeName and the participant’s state at |state.

The *CBO Budget Information* condition includes this same credit claiming about a highway expenditure, but pairs it with information about the budget consequences of the expenditure from the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO). We chose the CBO to deliver the information because the CBO is a trusted source both parties cite regularly. This allows us to isolate the explicit effect of budget information from the effect of budget information with partisan content. We also include overall cost of the program, providing information that the expenditure allocates equal money to all districts: $435 \times \$84 \text{ million} = \36.5 billion . Together, this condition provides constituents with information about the consequences of the project for their district and the consequences of the expenditure for the national budget. We randomly

Table 7.1: Content Across Conditions, Experiment 1

Headline: Representative |representativeLastName Announces \$84 Million for Local Road Projects

Body: Representative |representativeName (|party - |state) announced that the Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration has released \$84 million for local road and highway projects. Representative |representativeName said ‘I am pleased to announce that we will receive \$84 Million from the Federal Highway Administration. It is critical that we support our infrastructure to ensure that our roads are safe for travelers and the efficient flow of commerce.’ This funding will add lanes to |state highways.

CBO Budget Information: The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported that the spending bill is wasteful and contributes to the growing federal deficit. “This bill contributes to federal spending without identifying a new source of revenue or off-setting budget cuts. Accounting for the total cost of this program across all Congressional districts, the bill costs taxpayers \$36.5 billion, all of which is added to the deficit and compounded with interest.”

Key

|representativeName: Representative’s name

|party: Representative’s party

|state: Representative’s state

assigned our participants to the two conditions and then asked the participants about their representative and then the program.

Information about the budget consequences of the expenditures from the CBO severely undermines legislators’ credit claiming efforts. Including information about the budget consequences of an expenditure causes a severe drop in our participants’ evaluations of their legislators. The left-hand column of Table 7.2 presents the average feeling thermometer evaluations across the two conditions, with the 95-percent confidence interval presented below each average. The budget information from the CBO causes participants to decrease their evaluation of their representative 3.97 units

(95 percent confidence interval, [-8.04, 0.10]). This same decrease is found in legislators’ approval ratings. The second column from the left shows the proportion of participants who approve of their legislator across the two conditions. After providing the budget information, legislators’ approval ratings drop 12 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval [-0.19, -0.05]).

Table 7.2: Budget Information Undermines Support from Credit Claiming

Condition	Legislator Feeling		Fiscally	Delivering	Passing District
	Thermometer	Approve	Responsible	Money	Legislation
Credit Claiming	55.26	0.57	0.52	4.77	4.54
	[52.40, 58.13]	[0.52, 0.62]	[0.47, 0.57]	[4.61, 4.92]	[4.38, 4.70]
Budget	51.30	0.45	0.41	4.50	4.33
	[48.40, 54.19]	[0.40, 0.50]	[0.35, 0.46]	[4.34, 4.65]	[4.17, 4.49]

The budget information decreases legislators’ overall evaluations, in part, because it causes constituents to perceive their representative as wasteful. We asked participants if they agreed that their representative is fiscally responsible. The middle column shows that 52% of participants in the credit claiming condition rated their representative as fiscally responsible, but only 41% of participants in the budget condition agreed that their representative was fiscally responsible—a decrease of 11 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval, [0.35, 0.46]). That this decrease occurs only after the budget information is provided is evidence that constituents, unprompted, do not associate expenditures in the district with waste. But when the criticism is included in the story—as in the Edwards’ story in the previous section—the same expenditure is viewed as wasteful. And the legislators’ credit is undermined.

The effects of the undermined expenditures extend beyond overall evaluations: legislators’ impression of influence over spending is harmed when budget information is provided. The second column from the right shows the average evaluation of a

legislator's effectiveness at delivering money to the district, on a seven-point scale. Providing information causes constituents to view their representative as 0.27 points less effective at delivering money to the district (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.49, -0.05]). The budget information also causes legislators to appear less effective at passing legislation beneficial for the district (-0.21 decrease, 95 percent confidence interval [-0.43, 0.01]).

The first iteration of our experiment demonstrates that providing budget information—the kind of information that became salient with the Tea Party movement—undermines the credit legislators receive from constituents after announcing expenditures. The result is that legislators seem less effective and more wasteful. And most important for understanding how the Tea Party criticism affected credit claiming for the stimulus, legislators' overall evaluations suffer as a result.

This experiment demonstrates that legislators have incentive to avoid public disclosure if spending contributes to the deficit. But the use of the trusted non-partisan source—the CBO—may overstate our results. Most of the criticism of particularistic spending came from Tea Party candidates, Tea Party leaders, or from Republican members of Congress. And these partisan sources are likely to be viewed as less trustworthy. This is especially true for Democrats, who are likely to use a partisan heuristic to discount the opposing party criticism, because Democratic party officials have argued against the Tea Party rhetoric (Zaller, 1992). Even non-partisan respondents may dismiss attacks from partisan officials as simple bickering, rather than credible information.

In the second iteration of our experiment we created a condition that approximated this more contentious source of budget information. In our second experi-

ment we maintained our *credit claiming* condition and the *CBO Budget Information* condition in Table 7.3. To introduce the more contentious information we added a *Partisan Budget Information* condition. Participants in this condition receive budget information from a political figure likely to criticize the participant’s member of Congress: the opposing party’s national chairperson. For participants whose representative is a Democrat we included a statement from Reince Priebus—chair of the Republican National Committee. And for participants whose representative is a Republican we included a statement from Debbie Wasserman-Schultz—chair of the Democratic National Committee. Both the Democratic and Republican National Committees regularly criticize opposing partisans for actions in Congress—ensuring that our treatments replicate the kind of criticism that occurred in response to the stimulus. The statements from the opposing party chairpersons are harsher and more critical of the expenditure than the statement from the CBO. In addition to the CBO information on the budget consequences of the bill, the opposing party chairpersons also assert that “the spending bill is wasteful.” We administered this second iteration of our study to 1,166 participants—this time including non-partisans—census matched to the US sample from the SSI panel. We assigned participants to conditions, administered the treatment, and then collected information in a post-survey.

The results of the second iteration of our experiment replicate our first iteration, while also revealing that the source of the budget information matters little. Whether the information comes from the CBO or opposing partisans, it undermines legislators’ impression of influence and harms their overall evaluations. This is evident in the first column of Table 7.4, which shows the effect of the budget information on legislators’ feeling thermometer evaluations. Information from the CBO caused a 3.3

Table 7.3: Content Across Conditions, Experiment 2

Headline: Representative |representativeLastName Announces \$84 Million for Local Road Projects

Body: Representative |representativeName (|party - |state) announced that the Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration has released \$84 million for local road and highway projects. Representative |representativeName said ‘I am pleased to announce that we will receive \$84 Million from the Federal Highway Administration. It is critical that we support our infrastructure to ensure that our roads are safe for travelers and the efficient flow of commerce.’ This funding will add lanes to |state highways.

CBO Budget Information: The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported that the spending bill is wasteful and contributes to the growing federal deficit. “This bill contributes to federal spending without identifying a new source of revenue or off-setting budget cuts. Accounting for the total cost of this program across all Congressional districts, the bill costs taxpayers \$36.5 billion, all of which is added to the deficit and compounded with interest.”

Partisan Information: [Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, Chair of the Democratic National Committee/Reince Preibus, Chair of the Republican National Committee] said that the spending bill is wasteful and contributes to the growing federal deficit. “This bill contributes to federal spending without identifying a new source of revenue or off-setting budget cuts. Accounting for the total cost of this program across all Congressional districts, the bill costs taxpayers \$36.5 billion, all of which will be added to the deficit and compounded over time with interest.”

Key

|representativeName: Representative’s name

|party: Representative’s party

|state: Representative’s state

point reduction in average feeling thermometer evaluations (95 percent confidence interval, [-7.69, 1.09]), while the more strongly worded partisan attack reduced evaluations 5.15 points (95 percent confidence interval, [-9.49, -0.83]). The two sources of information also have a nearly identical effect on approval ratings—the budget information from the CBO caused an 8.2 percentage point decrease in approval ratings

Table 7.4: Regardless of Source, Budget Information Undermines The Impression of Influence

Condition	Legislator Feeling		Fiscally	Delivering	Passing District
	Thermometer	Approve	Responsible	Money	Legislation
Credit Claiming	54.56	0.51	0.44	4.69	4.56
	[51.48, 57.63]	[0.45, 0.56]	[0.39, 0.50]	[4.53, 4.85]	[4.39, 4.72]
Budget	51.25	0.43	0.39	4.40	4.30
	[48.13, 54.38]	[0.37, 0.48]	[0.33, 0.44]	[4.24, 4.56]	[4.13, 4.46]
Partisan Attack	49.40	0.43	0.37	4.53	4.36
	[46.34, 52.45]	[0.38, 0.48]	[0.32, 0.43]	[4.37, 4.68]	[4.19, 4.52]

(95 percent confidence interval [-0.16 , -0.01]) and the budget information from the party chairperson decreased approval ratings 7.7 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.15, -0.00]). Not only do both conditions that provide budgetary information cause a similar drop in overall legislator evaluations, the decrease we find in the second study is quite similar to the decreased evaluations in the first study—further evidence of the detrimental effects of the budgetary information on the credit legislators receive for spending.

The budgetary information from the partisan source affected perceptions of the legislator’s fiscal responsibility and ability to deliver money to the district—an effect that is indistinguishable when the CBO provides the information. The proportion of respondents who agreed that their representative is fiscally responsible decreases 5.9 percentage points when respondents are provided with information from the CBO (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.13, 0.02]) and the proportion decreases 7.1 percentage points when respondents are provided with the budget information in a partisan attack (95 percent confidence interval [-0.14, 0.00]). And we replicated that delivering budget information from party chairperson’s affects constituents’ perceptions of their legislator’s influence in Congress. Providing participants with non-partisan budget

information caused a 0.29 point reduction in the average evaluation of a legislator’s ability to deliver money to the district (95 percent confidence interval, [-0.51, -0.06]) a reduction indistinguishable from the reduction that occurs after participants receive information from a partisan source.

Tables 7.2 and 7.4 show that budget criticism undermines the effect of credit claiming on constituent evaluations—whether the source is the Congressional Budget Office or a member of the opposing party with incentive to attack. And the negative effects are pervasive, causing constituents to view their legislator more negatively. But the effects of criticism extend well beyond evaluations of legislators. The budget information also undermines support for government spending, causing constituents to express opposition to the program that funding the highway expenditure. Table 7.5 shows how budget information affects program support across both iterations of our experiment.

Table 7.5: Budget Information Erodes Support for the Spending Program

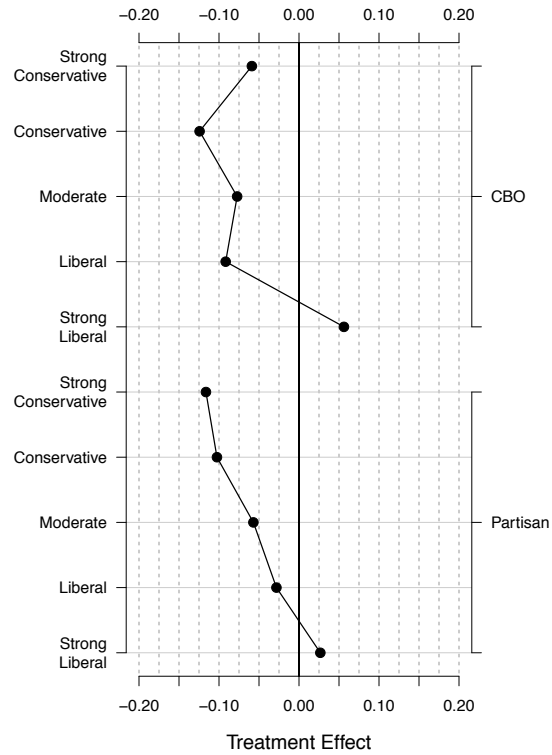
Condition	Experiment 1		Experiment 2	
	Oppose Program	Worth Money	Oppose Program	Worth Money
Credit Claiming	0.13 [0.09, 0.17]	0.61 [0.56, 0.66]	0.08 [0.03, 0.12]	0.63 [0.58, 0.68]
Budget	0.32 [0.28, 0.37]	0.47 [0.42, 0.52]	0.25 [0.21, 0.29]	0.55 [0.49, 0.60]
Partisan Attack	- -	- -	0.24 [0.20, 0.28]	0.52 [0.47, 0.57]

In both experiments we asked our participants if they oppose the spending program that allocated funds to the district. And in both experiments including the budget information caused a sharp increase in program opposition. In our first ex-

periment, budget information from the CBO causes a 21.2 percentage point increase in opposition to the program, (95 percent confidence interval [0.14, 0.28]). A similar effect is found across both conditions in the second iteration: the CBO causes a 17.3 percentage point increase in opposition, (95 percent confidence interval [0.11, 0.23]) and partisan budget information causes a 16.5 percentage increase in opposition (95 percent confidence interval [0.11, 0.22]). The budgetary information also causes constituents to perceive the program as wasteful. We asked our participants if they agreed that the program was “worth the money.” In our first iteration, the CBO information causes a 14.0 percentage decrease in the proportion of respondents who would agree program was worth cost (95 percent confidence interval [-0.21, -0.07]). Our second iteration replicates this finding with information from the CBO (8.4 percentage point decrease, 95 percent confidence interval, [-0.16, -0.01]) and party chairpersons (11.1 percentage point decrease, [-0.19, -0.04]) less likely to perceive the program as valuable.

Budget criticism, then, undermines the effect of legislators’ credit claiming efforts on their impression of influence over spending. This occurs because most ideologues have a negative reaction to the budget criticism. Figure 7.4 shows how the effect of criticism varies for constituents with different ideologies (left-hand vertical axis) for the CBO and partisan criticism (right-hand vertical axis), with the effect measured on legislators’ approval rating. To determine the heterogeneous treatment effects we used a weighted ensemble, as described in Grimmer, Messing and Westwood (2013). For both treatments, strong liberals actually have a positive response to the criticism while all other ideologues have a negative response. That strong liberals would respond positively is perhaps expected, as many progressive and liberal pundits—such as Paul

Figure 7.4: Heterogeneity in Response to Credit Claiming



Constituents response to the budget criticism varies with their ideology. Strong liberals have a positive response to the criticism—consistent with a rejection of the criticism about spending from Tea Party representatives. More conservative constituents, however, have a negative response to the criticism, punishing legislators when the constituents learn about the budget consequences of spending.

Krugman—responded to Tea Party rhetoric by asserting that budget deficits were not a pressing problem and that particularistic spending is only a small contributor to budget overruns (Krugman, 2010). All other ideologues, however, had a much more negative response to the budget criticism. Liberals (who are not strong liberals), moderates, and all conservatives allocated less credit to legislators after the criticism is announced.

Criticizing the budget implications of the expenditures undermines legislators’

credit claiming efforts in our experiment. The effect of the criticism, though, extends well beyond the immediate evaluations we capture in our experiment. The criticism also causes constituents to revise the credit that legislators receive for actual credit claiming messages outside of our experiment. In Table 7.6 we present the relationship between legislators’ actual credit claiming rates and constituents’ evaluations of their representative. To calculate this relationship we aggregated across all of our experiments involving actual House members and used our measures of credit claiming calculated in Chapter 3, after controlling for a number of potentially confounding covariates. In the top row of Table 7.6 we present the relationship between legislators’ credit claiming rates and the dependent variables when we provide constituents with only a credit claiming message. The left-hand column, for example, shows how legislators’ actual credit claiming rates affects constituents’ evaluations of their representative’s effectiveness at delivering the money to the district. As we would expect from Chapter 5, there is a positive effect—legislators who claim credit for more spending are perceived as more effective at delivering money.

Table 7.6: The Consequences of Budget Criticism for Legislators’ Credit Claiming Efforts

	Effective at Delivering Money	Feeling Thermometer
Credit Claiming	0.09 [0.05, 0.14]	1.94 [1.08, 2.81]
Budget Criticism	-0.17 [-0.31, -0.03]	-2.09 [-4.53, 0.36]

The bottom row of Table 7.6 shows there is a *negative* relationship between legislators’ credit claiming rates and their perceived effectiveness at delivering money when the budget implications of spending are criticized. After criticism legislators who claim credit more often are viewed as less effective by constituents. Criticism

also undermines the effect of credit claiming on overall support. In credit claiming conditions, legislators who actually have a higher credit claiming rate are evaluated more highly overall. But when budget criticism is introduced, legislators who claim credit more often are evaluated more negatively.

This reveals the power of Tea Party-like criticism to undermine legislators' efforts to cultivate an impression of influence. Not only does the criticism undermine the credit legislators receive for spending. It also causes constituents to revise how legislators present themselves. This turns a representative's strength—a personal vote that is based on perceptions as effective at delivering money to the district—into a liability. And as we now explore in the conclusion, the persistence of this criticism has broad implications for the possibility of using particularistic spending to build legislative coalitions.

7.3 Criticism, the Tea Party, and Consensus

This chapter demonstrates the potential downsides to credit claiming to cultivate a personal vote. When legislators engage in credit claiming they are creating an impression of influence over expenditures that go to the district. At the same time, they are associating themselves with expenditures that other legislators may label as wasteful—particularly when projects are financed by deficit spending. We show that Republicans are particularly likely to make this criticism. After Obama's election and Democrats passed a large Keynesian-stimulus, Republican legislators amplified their criticism of government spending and dampened their own credit claiming rates. This undermines legislators' ability to create an impression of influence over spending to cultivate a personal vote. Not only does the criticism affect how constituents respond

to one message—it also causes constituents to change their evaluations of legislators’ previous credit claiming.

The increase in budget criticism also suggests limitations to institutional reforms to solve some of Congress’ inability to pass legislation. When the Republicans reclaimed the majority in 2011 they also instituted a ban on earmarked funds in appropriations bill. The plan was intended to create transparency in government spending projects, forcing bureaucrats to vet all federal spending. The ban has been criticized by both politicians and political scientists. Politicians have argued that removing the ability to earmark funds cedes power to the executive agency. When legislators lack power over spending, they are often frustrated they cannot advance spending priorities in their district—no matter how popular the spending projects might be.

But the most common reason given to lift the earmark ban is that including federal spending may alleviate the partisan gridlock that has led to government shutdowns and near breaches of the debt ceiling. In high profile opinion pieces political scientists have argued that earmarks “if doled out strategically” can “provide an efficient way for presidents and congressional leaders to build coalitions for broad-based national legislation” (Patashnik, 2013). Journalists seized on political science research to make the same point. Matthew Yglesias has written that “The judicious application of lard emerged over the years as a time-honored means of greasing the wheels of government” (Yglesias, 2013). Leon Nayfakh argues that “in demonizing pork Congress accidentally gave up something deeply valuable: a tool for reaching compromise” (Nayfakh, 2013). Politicians have expressed similar sentiment. Tom Cole (R-OK) has argued that, with a ban on earmarks, “you’re removing all incentive for people to vote for things that are tough” (Greeley, 2013).

Our evidence in this chapter suggests, however, that earmarks alone are insufficient to induce compromise in Congress. This is because criticism undermines the value legislators attach to claiming credit for spending. Consider, for example, the Republican majority as they attempt to piece together a majority on key votes. Even if the leadership was able to distribute pork to its members, it is unclear that the most conservative legislators—who are also the most vocal critics of expenditures—would be willing to accept the earmarks in exchange for their votes. Given the vocal objections to particularistic spending it seems unlikely, in fact. Standard bearers for the Tea Party movement had previously refused earmarked funds. For example, Tom Coburn (R-OK) writes in his memoir about turning down a \$15 million earmark to support a federal highway appropriations bill. He asserts that “when we were asked to trade our vote for absolute control over \$15 million, we refused to participate in a process that had little integrity and was damaging to the country” (Coburn, 2003). Coburn articulates a more general argument—when legislators are cultivating support by objecting to spending, they have little reason to trade their votes for projects in their district.

More liberal Republicans and Democrats are also likely to be less willing to trade their votes for earmarked funds. This is because legislators who trade their votes for earmarks are likely to face vocal criticism, which we have shown may undermine the value of earmarked money. Consider, for example, how the 60 vote coalition was pieced together in the Senate for legislation that would eventually become the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare. While not in the final legislation, Ben Nelson (D-NE) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA) both received substantial financial concessions for their state in return for voting for the legislation. And both Nelson and Landrieu faced

vocal criticism from bill opponents for the deal. Conservative media were quick to label the special concessions for Nebraska’s medicaid contribution the “Cornhusker Kickback” and additional medicaid funds sent to Louisiana to entice Landrieu’s support was labeled the “Louisiana Purchase”. Conservative media were quick to equate the particularistic concessions for the senators’ states with bribes. For example, the conservative blogger Michelle Malkin listed recipients of concessions in an article titled “Cash for Cloture: Demcare Bribe List Part II” (Malkin, 2009). The vocal criticism eroded the value of the medicaid exceptions for the senators: exactly the kind of criticism that our results show undermine the value of credit claiming for legislators.

For both Republicans and Democrats the criticism of spending, however, makes the opportunity to claim credit for future expenditures in the district less valuable. And so the problem is not just that earmarks are unavailable. The problem is that legislators attach substantially less value to any particularistic spending. So even if earmarks become available, it seems that it may still be difficult to assemble coalitions to support legislation, because earmarks may erode support for legislators.

The detrimental effects of criticism may also help explain why legislative coalitions tend to be universalistic. For example, a large literature in the study of Congress has attempted to explain the extremely large coalitions in distributive spending bills—coalitions that are so large they are called “universalistic” (Weingast, 1979). We think the detrimental effect of budget criticism for the credit *individual* legislators receive provides strong incentives for party leaders to co-opt potential critics and create large coalitions (Weingast, 1979; Groseclose and Snyder, 1996; Balla et al., 2002). Rather than just attempting to defend a party brand (Balla et al., 2002), it seems that

legislators are also attempting to defend the value of particularistic spending in their own district. And this may also explain why party leaders are so harsh towards those who refuse to participate in the large coalitions: the leaders are attempting to dampen detrimental criticism. William Proxmire, for example, regularly criticized particularistic spending in Appropriations bills. In response, Proxmire's colleagues removed showers that he regularly used after running to work. After Jim DeMint (R-SC) and Tom Coburn (R-OK) joined the Senate in 2005 they introduced a series of amendments to embarrass Appropriators. In response, the Republican leadership removed funding for their offices.

This chapter has shown that the effect of credit claiming is contingent. The effect depends not just on how closely legislators associate themselves with spending in the district. It is also contingent on how other actors talk about expenditures. This demonstrates yet another way that the rhetoric on spending affects representation around spending. Dollars in the district alone are insufficient to cultivate support—constituents also have to believe those expenditures are worthwhile investments for legislators to receive credit. And if other politicians are successful at convincing constituents that expenditures are wasteful then an incumbent's strength—her impression of influence over spending—can become a weakness.

Chapter 8

Representation and the Impression of Influence

Pete Visclosky (D-IN) easily won reelection in 2012, defeating an upstart Republican challenger. One newspaper editorial endorsed Visclosky because of his “excellent record of service to the district” (Ross, 2012) and because the spending he directed to the district “helped the region move forward in multiple ways” (Ross, 2012). Visclosky had built a reputation as an effective advocate for the interests of his district—he had built an impression of influence over government expenditures. Visclosky directed spending to the district to cultivate this reputation. He also engaged in a sustained and public marketing campaign, to make certain constituents knew he was responsible for spending. When in his district, Visclosky regularly cut ribbons at new facilities, attended ground breaking ceremonies at new projects, and issued press releases about his efforts to direct new projects to the district.

When legislators like Visclosky claim credit for a project they ensure constituents learn about their representative’s work in Washington. The credit claiming solves

a problem for representatives—inattentive constituents may fail to reward them for expenditures in the district. It also creates an opportunity for legislators to receive credit for much more than spending as it occurs in the district. This book has shown how the credit claiming, credit allocation process works and how it matters for representation. Representatives engage in credit claiming to cultivate a personal vote, claiming credit for projects and expenditures likely to bolster support with constituents (Arnold, 1992; Ashworth, 2012). Constituents, in turn, react to the messages, evaluating messages based on the actions that legislators report performing and the types of expenditures they claim credit for obtaining. But constituents are much less responsive to the amount of money allocated to the project. Even though constituents lack strong preferences over spending, accountability is still possible. But rather than being responsive to constituents' stated preferences, legislators are responsive to the types of projects they anticipate will bolster their standing with constituents. This complicates accountability and forces us to consider how we might trade off more efficient outcomes with greater potential for deception.

We have characterized when and how legislators use spending to cultivate a personal vote. Legislators' credit claiming rates depend on the composition of their district. Representatives who need to cultivate support with independents and opposing partisans tend to claim credit for spending at higher rates than legislators who rely on their own partisans to win reelection. When legislators engage in credit claiming they claim much more than expenditures as they occur in the district. We show that legislators regularly claim spending long before it reaches the district and for projects that representatives could have had only an indirect role in securing. And legislators claim credit for relatively small amounts of money—with typical expenditures

providing relatively small contributions to the district.

Constituents are responsive to legislators' credit claiming messages. Claiming credit increases name recognition, but it also cultivates an impression of influence over expenditures. The impression of influence, in turn, leads to an increase in overall support for legislators—an increase larger than other non-partisan messages. When constituents evaluate credit claiming messages they tend to focus on the action legislators report and the recipient of the expenditure, rather than the amount that legislators claim credit for securing. The result is that repeated opportunities to engage in credit claiming is more valuable for legislators than increase the amount of money legislators claim in any one message.

Legislators value the opportunity to claim credit for spending, because it helps them to build support among constituents. This affects the institutions that disburse federal money. We show how the credit claiming, credit allocation process makes some grant programs politically robust—even though legislators have little control over how the expenditures are allocated. The political security rises because bureaucrats at the programs recognize the value legislators attach to merely announcing a project. So bureaucrats create opportunities for legislators to engage in an announcement—even if the legislator had only an indirect role in securing the grant. Legislators take advantage of the opportunity, implying they deserve credit for the grant, even without ever literally claiming credit for the grant. The opportunities work for bureaucrats—legislators who most regularly announce the expenditures defend the program from cuts. And they help legislators too—constituents reward legislators for merely implying they deserve credit for an expenditure.

Our evidence also shows the contingent value of credit claiming messages. Leg-

islaters create an impression of influence with their credit claiming messages, but how constituents allocate credit depends on what other political actors say about expenditures. If other legislators say spending is wasteful, this dampens the benefits of credit claiming. Merely explaining that spending will contribute to a budget deficit is sufficient for constituents to view particularistic expenditures as wasteful, rather than beneficial. And this affects overall evaluations of a legislator and her effectiveness. Recent political history shows that the risk of being criticized is real for many legislators. After Barack Obama's election, Republicans avoided credit claiming and instead attacked particularistic expenditures as wasteful, undermining other legislators' credit claiming efforts.

In this book we have shown that to understand how legislators use spending to build support, we must consider legislators' credit claiming efforts. In this concluding chapter, we explore what our evidence implies for political representation. Evaluating the implications of the process we describe in this book depends on our priorities in representation. If we prioritize the truthful and reasoned exchange of ideas, then the credit claiming process we describe is detrimental, with legislators regularly deceiving constituents. And assuming that we care about this exchange we propose some remedies that could increase the clarity in legislators' messages. But if we prioritize the policy outcomes, the credit claiming process is beneficial. It may encourage legislators to work harder to direct spending to the district and lead to more efficient expenditures.

The credit claiming, credit allocation process we describe occurs outside of Congress as legislators attempt to cultivate support in their districts. But the process also matters for the design of political institutions in Washington—affecting how the federal

government disburses funds and how the ability of expenditures to create legislative coalitions. And while our argument has focused on how members of Congress make the case they deserve credit for spending as it occurs in the district, our logic applies more broadly. Within the United States, a similar logic may help explain when and how legislators engage in other activities—such as oversight on Congressional committees. Outside of the United States, our logic may help explain when officials may need to engage in credit claiming to remove ambiguity about who is responsible for government actions.

This chapter reveals the broad implications of narrow district spending. With seemingly small expenditures legislators are able to cultivate support—demonstrating that representation is about much more than just the ideological alignment of legislators and their constituents.

8.1 Representation with Entrepreneurial Legislators

Legislators create support with credit claiming messages, acting like entrepreneurs to build political support. Representatives produce messages for constituents, encouraging them to allocate credit for projects that occur in the district. And constituents, in turn, are responsive to this encouragement, allocating credit to legislators for projects. Legislators' anticipation of constituents' reaction makes accountability on spending possible, even though constituents may struggle to articulate their spending priorities. Legislators will enact constituents' spending priorities if the representatives are effective at anticipating constituent reaction and cultivating support. This creates a

dynamic accountability (Arnold, 1992; Mansbridge, 2003; Ashworth, 2012).

This mechanism of accountability is qualitatively different than the notion of accountability and representation usually advanced in the empirical literature on political representation. Beginning with Miller and Stokes (1963) scholars have equated political representation with ideological agreement between constituents and representatives (Achen, 1978; Bafumi and Herron, 2010). Recent studies of ideological representation have provided even more precise insights into how legislators and constituents agree about expenditures, introducing tools for placing legislators and constituents into the same policy space, facilitating direct comparisons of preferences (Bafumi and Herron, 2010; Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2013*b*; Bonica, 2013). The new studies provide insights into how the policy views of constituents are aggregated into political tools in the institution.

The same techniques and standards, however, are unlikely to be useful for studying representation on district expenditures. This is because constituents lack the strong and well formed preferences to be situated in a “policy space”. Constituents’ evaluations of policies tend to be in response to legislators’ credit claiming statements, rather than the result of a reflecting on how some expenditure delivered to the district or proposed project align with deeply held beliefs. This different mechanism for accountability creates different risks for representation and different potential benefits. And how we even think about accountability in this setting depends on our priorities in representation.

8.1.1 The Potential for Deception to Harm Representation

Perhaps the most obvious risk to accountability is that legislators will engage in a broad and systematic deception of their constituents. That is, legislators may simply lie about the work that they have done in Washington or the efforts to direct spending back to the district. As we explain in Chapter 2, however, outright lies are very risky for legislators and exceedingly unlikely. Members of Congress and their staff know that simply fabricating actions could undermine legislators' prior credit claiming efforts and perhaps even derail a reelection campaign (Arnold, 1992). Similarly, local political officials will recognize if expenditures rarely arrive in the district. This makes it difficult for legislators to simply claim credit for requesting expenditures only and then shirk completely.

Legislators do, however, engage in a milder form of deception. Representatives regularly imply they deserve credit for expenditures, even though they could have only exercised only an indirect role in delivering the expenditure. The implications are successful. Constituents reward legislators who imply they deserve credit about the same as constituents reward legislators who literally state they deserve credit for the expenditure. Arthur Applbaum argues that this action is a redescription—an intentional focusing on facts to cause an interlocutor to reach a false conclusion (Applbaum, 1999). Participants in our experiments appear to agree that this is a deception as well. When legislators' implications are revealed participants decrease the credit allocated to legislators for the expenditure.

This deception is problematic if we believe that deliberation and the reasoned exchange of ideas are inherently important for representation. For philosophers in this tradition, they view deception as an action of unsanctioned authority by legisla-

tors. Kantian philosophers, for example, argue that for two individuals to be treated like equals they must each be truthful with each other (Korsgaard, 1997). Deceiving constituents is tantamount to make a decision for them—or an exercise in autocratic authority. Deliberative democrats take a similar stand against deception. As Mansbridge (2003) explains, deception is a form of “manipulation”, inducing constituents to support a legislator when they would be less supportive if given full information (Mansbridge, 2003). Other theorists argue that combining diverse ideas together can lead to better public decisions (Page, 2007; Ober, 2010). When legislators engage in deception, however, they undermine conditions that could lead to reasoned exchange of ideas and new policies.

If we worry about deception because of this corrosive effect, we might naturally ask how to limit legislators’ deceptions. This is no small task. Legislators vague language create plausible deniability for any accusation of lying. Legislators can accurately say they were not deceiving constituents if an opponent or other politician accuses the representative of being deceitful. After all, a legislator is never literally lying. This makes simple institutional changes—such as empowering opponents or opposite party officials—unlikely to work.

Perhaps the greatest potential change is to stop local media from reprinting press releases nearly verbatim. Grimmer (2013) shows that local newspaper outlets regularly reprint legislators’ press releases under a Staff or Associated Press byline. By providing legislators the chance to write their own news stories, newspapers and other media outlets repeat the deception. Reporters might still cover the announcement, but instead offer a more realistic account of how the expenditure was allocated to the district. Of course, this requires reporters educated on the appropriations process and

sufficient newspaper budgets to engage in this effort. Given the current constraints on budgets among local media, this makes this reform difficult to implement. And as we explain in the next section, there are potential reasons to not want to stop legislators from implying they deserve credit for spending.

8.1.2 The Potential for Deception to Improve Representation

If we prioritize the policy outcomes of the process—the allocation of expenditures across districts—then we may justify the deception. The value comes from a persistent problem in government budgets. For three decades scholars of government budgeting have worried that political consideration will cause inefficient allocations of expenditures (Ferejohn, 1974; Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen, 1981). Political power moves expenditures away from the projects that have the greatest economic return, instead moving to districts represented by the most politically powerful representatives—commonly referred to as pork-barrel projects. Anti-spending politicians have also argued that political influence in spending decisions exerts a corrupting influence. In one floor speech, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) asserted that “the corruption which stems from earmarking has resulted in current and former Members of both the House and Senate either under investigation, under indictment, or in prison” (McCain, 2010).

One way to purge political influence from spending decisions is to carefully authority delegate to an executive agency: members of Congress could write legislation that provides executive agencies with authority over disbursement decisions. This alone, however, is insufficient to remove political influence. Bureaucrats may try to cultivate Congressional support by directing expenditures to Congressional districts

(Ferejohn, 1974; Arnold, 1979). Or, executive officials may be responsive to political pressure from the presidential administration (Berry, Burden and Howell, 2010*b*). So in addition to the delegation of authority, legislators can also put in place rules that limits bureaucratic discretion—forcing the agency to award grants based on clear criteria that would be difficult to manipulate. One example of rules are competitive grant programs, where scoring of applications are based on clearly defined rules or conducted by experts not officially in the agency. In Chapter 6 we describe a competitive grant program that disburses fire department grants, where funding decisions are made through an automated scoring process and a team of expert reviewers not affiliated with the agency.

Delegating authority with rules to limit discretion limits the chance for political influence. But insulating the program from political manipulation may also make it politically fragile. We have shown how legislators value the opportunity to announce that have requested an expenditure for their district and then claim credit for securing that expenditure. If the competitive grant program is unable to provide these opportunities to legislators, members of Congress may see little value in the program. And this may make it more susceptible to budget cuts or even termination.

Creating credit claiming opportunities provides a solution to the program's political fragility—it provides an opportunity for bureaucrats at competitive grant programs to bolster Congressional support and by increasing support, the program makes itself politically robust. When the agency provides credit claiming opportunities it provides a reminder that it is valuable to reelection oriented members of Congress who want to create an impression of influence over expenditures. The value, however, comes at the cost of facilitating deception. When legislators to claim credit for the

spending they imply they are responsible for the expenditure, even though both the legislator and bureaucrat know full well the legislator had, at best, an indirect role in securing the expenditure. This occurs through the use of deceptive language and the opportunity for legislators to announce expenditures before the agency.

This deception may make constituents materially better off and if given a choice between institutions, constituents might prefer a representation system where legislators actively engage in deception. This seems counterintuitive at first—why would constituents prefer a legislators who exerts little effort for an expenditure to a legislator who works hard to deliver a project to the district? Constituents make the choice for deception, however, because the *system* of expenditures may be more efficient. Programs may be more likely to allocate expenditures to more efficient projects when deception is possible and budgets may be less susceptible to budget overruns. The benefits of this system may override any potential negative material costs from having a shirking representative who exerts little actual effort. Similarly, having a legislator exert effort to deliver spending to a district may be beneficial to the district, but may impose systemic costs.

If given a choice between institutions, then, constituents may choose a system where they are deceived, rather than a system where expenditures are broadly decided on a political basis. It should be emphasized, however, that this choice is only a theoretical possibility and this limits the power of the consequentialist justification for deception. If the deception is revealed to constituents, our evidence shows that legislators will no longer receive credit for the expenditure (see Chapter 6). This forces legislators and bureaucrats to decide that constituents are better off being deceived: the very political elites who benefit from the deception are also deciding

if the deception is justified. So we may have reason to justify the deception, but constituents are never able to choose to be deceived—rather elites, who benefit from the deception, must make the choice. This creates a new risk—legislators may deceive constituents, even if the deception is not economically justified.¹

8.2 Contingent Value of Particularistic Spending and Its Implications for Institutions

Throughout the book we have emphasized that legislators receive credit for spending if they make the case that they deserve credit. In the absence of this credit claiming effort, constituents will struggle to attribute projects in the district to their member of Congress. The value of spending, then, depends on legislators' efforts to be associated with the projects in their district. The same project in two Congressional districts could have very different electoral consequences, depending on how hard legislators work to be associated with it.

For legislators to be rewarded for expenditures they not only need to make the case that they deserve credit. They also need others to not criticize the expenditures—the value of credit claiming depends on what other legislators say about particularistic expenditures. If other legislators and political elites criticize particularistic expenditures then legislators' credit for those expenditures is diminished. And the criticism causes constituents to reconsider legislators' prior credit claiming efforts—introducing budget criticism creates a negative relationship between higher rates of credit claiming

¹We might be worried that expenditures only constitute a small portion of the federal budget. While this is an important objection, we think its force is dampened by two considerations. First, legislators are able to exert political influence on formula grants (Martin, 2012). Second, even small expenditures in the district may be consequential for local budgets or for local organizations.

and legislator approval.

The force of this criticism is particularly relevant given the recent rise in anti-spending rhetoric among the Republican party. After the election of Barack Obama, the passage of a massive stimulus spending bill, and the emergence of the Tea Party Republican House members began avoiding claiming credit for spending. Instead they became more vocal in their criticism of government expenditures. Rather than claiming credit for money going to their districts, Republicans became more likely to decry the rise of “big government”, the increase in “national debt”, or cite specific expenditures in districts as “wasteful spending”.

That the value of spending depends on the absence of criticism from legislators not only matters for understanding how legislators use particularistic spending to cultivate a personal vote. It also helps us understand how particularistic expenditures can be used to create legislative coalitions. Political scientists have argued that the ability to direct particularistic expenditures to the district facilitate the formation of legislative coalitions (Lee, 2003*a*; Evans, 2004). The key insight is that legislators are willing to cast votes that they might otherwise be reluctant to cast, if they can offset some of the electoral risk with the opportunity to claim credit for expenditures in the district. And recently, politicians and political scientists have argued that a return to earmarking may be key to overcoming some of the gridlock that has characterized Congresses after the ban of earmarked funds.

Our evidence suggests, however, that as long as the Republican party continues criticizing government expenditures that lifting the earmark ban will be insufficient to overcome legislative gridlock. This is because the criticism substantially dampens the value of particularistic projects—rather than off setting the electoral risks of casting

controversial votes, it may introduce new electoral risks, particularly for Republicans. For party leaders to effectively use spending as a tool to build legislative coalitions, then, it requires not only the ability to distribute funds. It also requires a change in how legislators talk about spending—a shift in the expressed attitudes towards expenditures in the district. A reform that requires much more than a change in the House rules.

8.3 Impressions in Other Contexts

Legislators create an impression of influence to receive credit for expenditures in the district. While we have focused on how this affects representation around spending, legislators' impressions are likely to affect representation in other areas of policy. For example, legislators may attempt to create an impression of oversight when participating in Congressional hearings. This may explain why legislators are quick to participate in very prominent televised committee hearings. Participating in the hearings provides legislators an opportunity to appear in local news and to give the impression they are providing careful oversight as a member of Congress. This provides legislators an electoral incentive to participate in oversight—perhaps alleviating a collective action problem for members of Congress. Similarly, we might expect that legislators will attempt to create impressions that they were instrumental in the passage of new legislation. As Mayhew (1974) argued, legislators' credit claims must be plausible—they must have a reasonable claim to have affected policy in some way. But legislators may have ample opportunity to imply they were influential in a policy process, or to claim credit for one small component of a policy.

The impression of influence over expenditures may occur in other contexts as well.

For example, Cruz and Schneider (2013) show how elected officials in the Philippines imply they deserve credit for disaster aid allocated by foreign governments. Indeed, we might expect that any situation where elected officials face the representative's problem—that inattentive constituents are unlikely to notice activities legislators do to cultivate support—politicians have an incentive to create an impression of influence. Understanding the impression of influence in a comparative context, would help better illuminate when and how legislators use rhetoric to receive credit for projects in the district.

8.4 The Impression of Influence

Legislators solve the representative's problem with their credit claiming statements. This ensures legislators are able to use the tools of office to cultivate support and it ensures that entrepreneurial legislators are able to be accountable to constituents. But the credit claiming, credit allocation process creates new risks to representation and new opportunities for disbursement. To understand how and why the federal government distributes money through programs, we need to study more than just disbursement as it occurs to Congressional districts. We also need to understand how legislators create an impression of influence over expenditures.

Appendix A

Text as Data: Methods Appendix

In this Appendix we provide more details about how we classify the nearly 170,000 House press releases as credit claiming or not. Our strategy will be to make use of recent Text as Data methods (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013), while also utilizing methods from other fields to improve upon the classification.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, our goal is to provide a label for each of the press releases as claiming credit for spending or not. We begin with 800 triple hand coded documents, which we will use to *supervise* statistical models for text. To classify the texts we use *supervised* learning techniques. The idea is that we will learn a relationship between the hand coded labels and the words (or other features) in the texts. We will then use this relationship between labels and features to predict the label for all the remaining documents. The result of the process is that all the press releases will be labeled.

As with all text as data methods, we need to make a series of simplifying assumptions that make statistical modeling of the texts feasible (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). Because we are performing supervised learning, choices about which assump-

tions to make are guided by our simple goal: accurately replicating hand coding. Our particular set of assumptions were chosen to optimize out of sample classification performance. We begin with the bag of words assumption—discarding information about the order of words in a document. While this may be a strong assumption in other contexts (Spirling, 2012), our assessments showed that additional information on word order failed to increase our classification accuracy. We also discarded words placeholder words (like **the** or **a**), and words that appeared in less than three documents. While common in other large collections of text, we did not *stem* the words in our documents—remove the ends of words in order to return the *stem* of the word (Porter, 1980)—because stemming words decreased our classification accuracy. The result of the preprocessing steps is that each of our documents is a vector of word counts.

We use this representation of our press releases and our hand coded documents to train a model to classify the remaining press releases as credit claiming or not. There are a number of well established statistical methods for performing this classification, such as: support vector machines (Tong and Koller, 2002), LASSO (Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman, 2001), elastic-net (Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman, 2001), random forests (Breiman, 2001), and Kernel Regularized Least Squares (KRLS) (Hainmueller and Hazlett, 2012), among many others. Each of the individual classifiers are likely to perform well on particular problems, but there are other problems where the classifiers are likely to be less useful. We could instead apply all the methods individually and then choose the method with the highest out of sample performance (Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman, 2001). This takes advantage of the methods that performs well on this problem, but this fails to exploit the power from the other methods.

To do this we adapt the *super learner* ensemble method for text classification (van der Laan, Polley and Hubbard, 2007). The training procedure for super learning proceeds in two steps. First, we replicate our coding task and assess how well our constituent methods can predict a document’s label, using our hand labeled documents. We include five methods in our ensemble: a support vector machine (SVM), LASSO, elastic-net, random forests, and KRLS. The result of this first step are a set of weights that we attach to our methods. Second, with the weights in hand, we then use our entire set of hand labeled documents to train our classification algorithms and make predictions about the probability of each unlabeled document being a credit claiming press release. We then generate a weighted average of the predicted probability, using the weights from the first step.

Specifically, we use 10-fold cross validation (Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman, 2001; van der Laan, Polley and Hubbard, 2007) to generate predictions for our hand coded labels. We then use the predictions to fit a regression of the true label on the hand coded labels. We constrain this regression to have the coefficients all be greater than zero and sum to 1, so the coefficients are interpretable as weights. We then fit the set of methods to the entire collection of training documents and use the weights from this first step.

In Chapter 3 we evaluate this method with 10-fold cross-validation. To perform this evaluation, we perform this entire procedure within each fold of the cross-validation. This ensures all our evaluations are out of sample.

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