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# Constituency Characteristics and the “Guardian” Model of Appropriations Subcommittees, 1959–1998

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In this paper I examine the composition of ten House Appropriations subcommittees from 1959–1998 and explore the extent to which these subcommittees are comprised of members who have specific constituency needs for the benefits supplied by programs under their jurisdiction. Congressional scholars have suggested several different patterns for the constituency bias of these panels, and I study whether we can confirm or reject portions of the “guardian” and “claimant” models of Appropriations subcommittee composition. Using extensive data on the district characteristics of all legislators for nearly 40 years, along with a Monte Carlo simulation technique for examining difference in medians, I find that several Appropriations subcommittees are composed of members with disproportionately high need for the benefits under their control. I also find that while there was a shift toward more “advocacy” on these panels in the early 1960s, there have been few changes in this trend since. The Republican takeover of Congress in 1995 only marginally altered the group of subcommittees that attracted high need members. The findings of this study lend some credence to distributive notions of congressional committee composition.

Research on the Appropriations committees in Congress has primarily focused on two questions which are at the core of positive theories of legislative structure: what kind of members are assigned to these panels and what role do these committees play in the policy process? Recent scholarship has emphasized partisan explanations for the composition and functions of Appropriations committees and subcommittees (Aldrich and Rohde 1996; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). However, the conventional wisdom concerning the composition of Appropriations has varied considerably over time. At different periods members have been considered budget cutting “guardians of the federal treasury,” reelection-minded claimants on government funds, or “point-people” for the pursuit of a partisan agenda.

I focus here on the question of Appropriations subcommittee composition and leave the issue of legislative outputs aside for the moment. I first examine how well the differing perceptions of Appropriations members map onto the existing theories of legislative structure. Then, to test the primary conflict between the guardian and claimant theories, I study the composition of ten House Appropriations subcommittees from 1959 to 1998 and explore the extent to which these subcommittees are comprised of members whose constituents demand the benefits supplied by programs under their jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> Unlike most previous studies of Appropriations subcommittees (or even full authorizing committees) that have analyzed the question of committee preferences by examining ideology scores (ADA,

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<sup>1</sup>I focus on the House panel because among other things it is the more dominant of the Appropriations committees in Congress. Schick notes that the House committee takes the lead on appropriations legislation and crafts the bills that are subsequently considered by their Senate counterpart (1995, 133).

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NOMINATE, etc.; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Wrighton and Peterson 1994) or party unity scores (Aldrich and Rohde 1996; Marshall, Prins, and Rohde 1998), I address directly the issue of constituency needs by studying the characteristics of members' congressional districts. Implicitly, I explore the extent to which these panels are representative of the constituency needs of the House as a whole. To examine the correspondence of committee and chamber preferences, I utilize a Monte Carlo simulation technique that allows for reliable tests of difference-in-medians between subcommittee and chamber interests.

### **Guardians or Claimants? Differing Perspectives on Appropriations Membership**

Seats on the House and Senate Appropriations committees are considered to be among the most politically powerful positions in Washington, D.C.,<sup>2</sup> in part because of their unique authority over huge portions of the federal budget.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it should be no surprise that these are some of the most sought-after assignments in Congress. Tests of committee attractiveness—the frequency with which legislators seek assignment to one panel or another—continually find that House Appropriations ranks among the top two or three committees (Groseclose and Stewart 1998; Jewell and Chi-Hung 1974; Munger 1988; Ray 1982). But from where does the value of this committee assignment originate? Is it primarily the electoral connection (Mayhew 1974)—the ability of members to serve the needs of their districts through the exclusive budgetary authority and jurisdiction of Appropriations subcommittees? Or are members also lured to Appropriations by the power this panel has to serve the loftier responsibility of determining the general direction of the federal budget and preventing wasteful spending?

The traditional belief about the composition of Appropriations subcommittees, which conforms to the notion of members as guardians of the federal treasury, is that subcommittee assignments are made through a practice of “non-advocacy” (Fenno 1966, 141–142). That

<sup>2</sup>Former U.S. representative and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Jack Kemp, probably exaggerated a bit when he declared, “The Appropriations Committee is the most powerful committee in the history of the democratic experience” (quoted in Munson 1993, 7).

<sup>3</sup>For FY1998 the thirteen regular appropriations bills accounted for over \$850 billion in total federal spending (*CQ Almanac* 1998).

is, members are granted seats on subcommittees in a manner that avoids the possible conflict of interest resulting from control over budgets for federal programs that matter to legislators' constituencies. This perspective is frequently attributed to the Appropriations Committee prior to the budgetary reforms in the mid-1970s and is often called the “Cannon-Taber norm.”<sup>4</sup> Wallace's understanding of Appropriations subcommittee assignments was typical of many who studied the committee in the 1950s and 1960s: “Those who serve on the House [Appropriations] subcommittees represent regions that have little stake in the appropriations under their subcommittee's jurisdiction and thus subcommittee members do not quaver at the thought of substantial [budget] reductions” (1960, 29). As late as 1983, Maass held that in spite of the changes in the budgetary process, the membership of the Appropriations Committee has retained many of its traditional norms, including those of budget cutting (1983, 130–135).

The “guardian” notion of Appropriations subcommittee composition conforms to one of the main predictions of Krehbiel's informational theory—the outlier principle. Krehbiel states that in order to avoid informationally inefficient and/or distributionally nonmajoritarian committees, a legislature will purposely try to prevent the formation of panels with drastically different or high demand preferences. This standard is even more likely for a committee whose powers are as far-reaching and important as Appropriations. In fairness, however, Krehbiel does not insist that committees must be composed of “disinterested,” but he does argue that they will be heterogeneous and representative of the spectrum of preferences in the chamber as whole (Krehbiel 1991, 95–96).

More recent claims about Appropriations, particularly since the budgetary reforms of the 1970s, contend that its subcommittees are composed of legislators seeking to benefit their congressional districts through assignment to panels with jurisdiction over relevant federal programs and agencies (LeLoup 1980, 122). Schick posits that one of the primary reasons for this change in the early 1970s was that members no longer needed approval for subcommittee assignments from the committee leadership, but could pick their seats in accord with a seniority-based procedure. Moreover, Schick goes so far as to argue that “[e]ven in the heyday of fiscal control, Appropriations subcommittees tended to be dominated

<sup>4</sup>The phrase refers to the committee chair and ranking minority member who served during this pre-budgetary reform era and were seen to have instituted the practice of “nonadvocacy” in subcommittee assignments.

by program supporters; the forced placement of ‘indifferents’ on the subcommittees was an exceptional practice” (1980, 432; see also White 1989).<sup>5</sup>

The “claimant” notion of Appropriations members conforms to our accepted understanding of reelection-oriented politicians using congressional institutions to enhance their electoral prospects (Fiorina 1989; Mayhew 1974). This perception fits quite well with the distributive view of congressional committee structure. The description of distributive policy-making put forth by Rundquist and Ferejohn contends that “members from constituencies with a pecuniary interest in a particular form of government activity seek membership on a constituency-relevant authorizing committee or appropriations subcommittee . . . [W]hen the districts of committee members are compared with those of other congressmen, the committees will be found to over-represent constituencies with a stake in their subject matter” (Rundquist and Ferejohn 1975, 88).

Since 1994, however, the established understanding of Appropriations behavior has been challenged by the Republican takeover of the House in the 104th Congress. Newt Gingrich and the Republican leadership revealed in two ways their desire to reduce federal spending and alter the existing patterns on the House Appropriations Committee, which were seen as bipartisan and self-serving (Aldrich and Rohde 1996). First, Gingrich selected Robert Livingston (R-LA) as the full committee chair, leap-frogging several more senior Republicans largely because they were perceived as not being partisan or aggressive enough to cut federal spending (Evans and Oleszek 1997, 87). Second, Gingrich required that all GOP Appropriations members sign a “letter of fidelity” that bound them to follow the leadership’s plan of budget cutting (Evans and Oleszek 1997, 120). Furthermore, Republican rhetoric during the transition was intended to signal to potential Appropriations assignees that it would no longer protect pet programs and funnel benefits to congressional districts (Aldrich and Rohde 1996; Deering and Smith 1997, 67–68).

The objectives set forth by the Republican leadership through management of Appropriations’ members and agenda correspond with the principles of partisan con-

trol over legislative structure stated in the works of scholars such as Aldrich and Rohde (1996) and Cox and McCubbins (1993). But the Republican leaders’ explicit implication about the composition of the panel is similar to that of guardian model—narrowly focused Appropriations subcommittees should *not* be made up of legislators acting as constituency advocates. Gingrich and the GOP leadership saw constituency-oriented Appropriations subcommittees as an impediment to pursuing their partisan agenda.

We are faced, therefore, with two opposing assumptions as to the composition of Appropriations subcommittees. On the one hand, scholars argue that these panels are composed of legislators who are disinterested, at least from a constituency perspective, in the programs they control. The informational and partisan approaches claim that this principle of nonadvocacy should describe Appropriations particularly in the pre-reform (up to the mid-1970s) and strong partisan eras (for simplicity, just the recent Republican congresses). On the other hand, a distributive perspective predicts that these subcommittees, like other panels in Congress, are made up of reelection-oriented representatives seeking to provide for constituency needs through budgetary control. While this is most likely to be the case after institutional reforms eased the process of subcommittee self-selection (in the mid-1970s), some scholars assert that this constituency advocacy existed even earlier.

### Previous Studies of Appropriations Subcommittee Composition

Two previous studies of House Appropriations subcommittee membership concentrated on the ideological composition of these panels but arrived at slightly different conclusions. Employing Poole and Rosenthal’s D-NOMINATE scores (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), Kiewiet and McCubbins find that liberal and moderate Democrats on these panels were generally balanced by conservative Republicans, particularly for the period 1965–1984 (1991, chapter 5). Conversely, Wrighton and Peterson (1994) use ADA scores to conclude that Appropriations subcommittees are frequently ideological outliers compared to the full committee between 1979 and 1995.

Though both studies are useful for our understanding of Appropriations subcommittee membership, research employing ideology scores (derived from roll-call votes) cannot tell us much about the tendencies of these

<sup>5</sup> Even Fenno, who is frequently cited as the primary advocate of the older guardian model of Appropriations behavior, gives a certain amount of credence to the belief that subcommittee assignments *prior to the budgetary reforms* in some ways conformed to members distributive needs (1966, 140). Fenno eventually reconciles these seemingly opposing goals a few years later when he states that the objective of re-election for Appropriations members is usually subordinated to the aim of institutional power procured through service to the needs of the chamber (1973, 4).

panels to over-represent particular constituency interests. Kiewiet and McCubbins, on this point, contend that a “cursory examination of the economic and demographic characteristics of [congressional] districts” reveals a mix of subcommittees (they are never specific about which subcommittees) both before and after the budgetary reforms have few members with constituency-oriented interests, while others have a number of “interested” assignees. They conclude, however, that examination of the Cannon-Taber norm is extremely problematic for two reasons. First, subcommittee jurisdictions are very broad and heterogeneous, and therefore anyone could find something of interest on any panel. Second, assignment to a specific subcommittee may be a result of not having room on the “right” committee, so what is really needed is request data rather than assignment data (1991, 130–131).

I argue that Kiewiet and McCubbins’ objections can be addressed. First, subcommittee jurisdictions are not as heterogeneous as they claim; it is possible to define district profiles that suggest high levels of need for programs under each panel’s jurisdiction. Second, substituting assignment data for request data is not a tremendous problem. If the concern is that representatives of high need constituencies (the ones who presumably would request assignment to a particular panel) are not necessarily the ones *granted* the assignment, then there is a decreased likelihood that examination of assignment data will reveal committees composed of members with extreme district needs. This, of course, would bias tests in favor of heterogeneous subcommittees and make results in the other direction that are much more convincing.

## Testing the Theories

The theoretical debate outlined above leads to clear, testable questions. First, have Appropriations subcommittees been dominated by legislators from districts with disproportionately high levels of need? And second, did the make-up of these committees change noticeably at the end of the Cannon-Taber era, after the budgetary reforms in the mid-1970s or following the Republican takeover in 1995?

As Kiewiet and McCubbins contend, determining the composition of these subcommittees requires first defining subcommittee jurisdictions and high interest constituencies. This is accomplished by identifying the programs and agencies whose budgets are both considered and legislated by each panel. I determined jurisdictional boundaries by examining appropriations bills reported by

each subcommittee annually and distinguishing the programs and agencies on which each panel held hearings.<sup>6</sup>

Once the programs under the control of each subcommittee were specified, I considered the social, economic, and geographic characteristics that would identify a congressional district as “interested” in the jurisdiction of each panel.<sup>7</sup> This was done for the ten subcommittees who appropriate the vast majority of the funds under the control of the full Appropriations committee<sup>8</sup> and is similar to the process of determining high need districts for authorizing committees used in Adler and Lapinski (1997). For many subcommittees this method resulted in clear profiles of high need districts. For instance, rural agricultural districts are likely to have strong interest in the programs controlled by the Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee.

I then utilized a number of sources to create a detailed dataset of information about the characteristics of all 435 congressional districts for the entire time period.<sup>9</sup> The list of subcommittees, selected distributive programs under their jurisdiction, descriptions of related high need district profiles and measures are provided in Table 1. In some instances the subcommittee had property rights over a diverse set of federal programs and agencies (for example, the Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary Subcommittee) and required an extensive set of measures to account for a constituency “interest” in the many different dimensions of the subcommittee’s jurisdiction.

In order to create a single measure of need for a subcommittee’s jurisdiction that can be used in the tests described below, the component measures were combined into one score. The combined scores of subcommittee “need” were created by standardizing all component

<sup>6</sup> Program and agency names were taken from a database of U.S. domestic assistance programs (Bickers and Stein 1996) and hearings data were examined using the Congressional Information Service’s Published Congressional Hearings Index on CD-ROM. The findings of my analysis of subcommittee jurisdictions using hearings were confirmed through examination of Baumgartner and Jones’ Agendas data (Baumgartner and Jones 1998). For a more complete study of committee jurisdictions, see King (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Critical for this study was finding constituency characteristics for which data existed at the congressional district level (or could be aggregated to this level) for the nearly 40 years examined.

<sup>8</sup> The regular appropriations bills considered by these ten panels made up 98 percent of the funds appropriated by all thirteen subcommittees for FY1998.

<sup>9</sup> Some of these data are taken from the decennial U.S. Census, but also include a number of variables collected from a diverse set of governmental and nongovernmental sources. A description of the sources and means of measurement for variables can be obtained from the author.

**TABLE 1 Appropriations Subcommittees, High Need Districts, and Demand-Side Measures**

Subcommittee	Selected Distributive Programs under Subcommittee Jurisdiction	District Types with Highest Expected Need	Demand-Side Measures
Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agric Cooperative Service</li> <li>• Farm Credit Administration</li> <li>• Farmers Home Administration</li> <li>• Rural Electrification Admin</li> <li>• Agric Stabil and Conserv Admin</li> </ul>	Agriculturally oriented and rural districts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent employed in farming, fishing, and wildlife (Census Occupational Code)</li> <li>• Percent living in rural-farming areas</li> </ul>
Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Development Admin</li> <li>• Small Business Admin</li> <li>• Minority Business Devel Agency</li> <li>• Legal Services Corporation</li> <li>• Immig and Naturalization Srv</li> <li>• Federal Maritime Commission</li> <li>• Ntl Oceanic and Atmos Admin</li> <li>• Federal Bureau of Investigation</li> <li>• Drug Enforcement Administration</li> <li>• Fed Communications Cmmn</li> </ul>	Districts that are poor, in urban areas, with large percentages of minorities and immigrants, have high crime rates or maritime concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent African-American</li> <li>• Percent living in urban areas</li> <li>• Percent self-employed</li> <li>• Percent foreign born</li> <li>• District borders a coastal area or the Great Lakes (dummy)</li> <li>• District is in a city with one of the 25 most active ports (dummy)</li> </ul>
Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Payments to military personnel</li> <li>• Operations and maintenance of armed forces (except for military construction)</li> </ul>	Districts with military installations and/or high levels of military employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of military installations</li> <li>• Number of major military installations (Fort, Base, Air Force Base, etc.)</li> <li>• Size of "military workforce" (non-civilian labor force)</li> </ul>
Energy and Water (Public Works)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Army Corps of Engineers</li> <li>• Nuclear Regulatory Commission</li> <li>• Bureau of Reclamation</li> <li>• various power administrations and energy research programs</li> </ul>	Districts with tremendous flood potential or interested in energy research and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relative flood potential level</li> <li>• Location of nuclear power facilities.</li> <li>• Location of top 100 research universities</li> </ul>
Interior and Related Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureau of Land Management</li> <li>• National Park Service</li> <li>• U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service</li> <li>• Bureau of Indian Affairs</li> </ul>	Rural districts with large land areas controlled by the Interior Department or Forest Service, or large numbers of Native Americans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State acreage owned by the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management (logged)</li> <li>• Population density</li> </ul>
VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies (Independent Offices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dept of Housing and Urban Devel</li> <li>• Community Devel Block Grants</li> <li>• Fed Emergency Management Agn</li> <li>• National Science Foundation</li> <li>• Department of Veterans Affairs</li> <li>• Ntl Aeronautics and Space Admn</li> </ul>	Districts in urban areas with large poor populations, or substantial numbers of veterans or large facilities administered by the VA, or large research universities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent living in urban areas</li> <li>• District contains one of the 50 largest central cities (dummy)</li> <li>• Median family income</li> <li>• Percent of population who are veterans</li> <li>• Number of beds in district VA hospital</li> </ul>

**TABLE 1 Appropriations Subcommittees, High Need Districts, and Demand-Side Measures (continued)**

Subcommittee	Selected Distributive Programs under Subcommittee Jurisdiction	District Types with Highest Expected Need	Demand-Side Measures
Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employ and Training Admin</li> <li>• Occup Safety and Health Admin</li> <li>• Health Resources and Serv Admin</li> <li>• National Institutes of Health</li> <li>• various Dept. of Ed programs</li> <li>• unemployment benefits</li> </ul>	Districts with poor school systems or those with a high percentage of blue-collar employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent employed in blue-collar industries (Census Occupational Code)</li> <li>• Percent of workers in state unionized</li> <li>• Percent attending public elementary and high school</li> <li>• Median family income</li> </ul>
Military Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction, replacement or maintenance of facilities for the armed forces</li> </ul>	Districts with military installations and/or high levels of military employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of military installations</li> <li>• Number of major military installations (Fort, Base, Air Force Base, etc.)</li> <li>• Size of "military workforce" (non-civilian labor force)</li> </ul>
Transportation and Related Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dept of Transportation</li> <li>• U.S. Coast Guard</li> <li>• Federal Highway Administration</li> <li>• Federal Aviation Administration</li> <li>• Urban Mass Trans Admin</li> </ul>	Districts with large numbers of workers in transportation, or those which have urban or coastal areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent employed in transportation and public utilities (Census Industry Code)</li> <li>• Percent employed in construction (Census Industry Code)</li> <li>• Percent unemployed</li> <li>• Percent living in urban areas</li> <li>• District contains one of the 50 largest central cities (dummy)</li> <li>• District borders a coastal area or the Great Lakes (dummy)</li> </ul>
Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Postal Service</li> <li>• General Services Administration</li> <li>• U.S. Customs Service</li> <li>• Internal Revenue Service</li> </ul>	Districts with high levels of postal or civil service employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent employed by the government (Census Class of Worker Code)</li> </ul>

measures (a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one) and then summing.<sup>10</sup> For example, the measure of “need” for the jurisdiction of the Agriculture subcommittee is an additive scale of standardized measures of both the percent in each district employed in farming and the percent living in rural-farm areas. Therefore, members who rank high on both measures have a greater “need” for the policy benefits provided by the Agriculture Subcommittee than a member who ranks highly on only one of the two components.<sup>11</sup>

The tests of subcommittee composition utilize need score medians rather than means, since medians have more theoretical significance when exploring the central tendency of decision-making bodies like congressional committees (Black 1958; Shepsle 1979). I employ a nonparametric Monte Carlo simulation technique to test the difference-in-medians between the subcommittees and the entire chamber.<sup>12</sup> This test offers one indication of whether the district interests of the subcommittee are “unrepresentative” of the entire chamber.<sup>13</sup> A computer program runs a simulation that constructs 10,000 “sample” subcommittees of randomly selected members (without replacement) from the entire House membership for each real subcommittee and reports their medians. These sample subcommittees are of the

same size as the actual subcommittee in each congressional term. Using these sample subcommittees as a distribution we may then determine how much more extreme (a higher need score) the actual panel is from the central tendency of the chamber.

A critical step in determining the correspondence of the constituency needs of subcommittee and chamber members is defining the rejection region. Like the convention for statistical inference, the standard for Monte Carlo median tests of this type has been to utilize a  $p$ -value level of .05 or less (Adler and Lapinski 1997; Groseclose 1994; Peterson and Wrighton 1998) with a null hypothesis that committees are “representative” of the chamber as a whole. Therefore, the null is rejected if less than 5 percent of our sample subcommittee medians are as extreme as the actual subcommittee median. The results of the difference-in-medians tests are provided in Table 2. The numbers in each cell are the percentage of 10,000 sample subcommittees that the median need score of the actual committee is more extreme. For example, the actual median need score of Agriculture Subcommittee members in the 86th Congress (1959–60)—2.87—is more extreme than the medians of 99 percent of the randomly created sample subcommittees of the same size (seven members), translating into a  $p$ -level of .01.

Notwithstanding the “.05 criterion,” there is nothing to prevent one from exploring broader trends in the data even if they do not meet this level of significance. To be sure a “tendency” in the direction of extreme panel constituency needs might be sufficient evidence to reject a hypothesis that Appropriations subcommittees are composed of disinterested legislators. In fact, it may be reasonable to argue that the null hypothesis for tests of Appropriations subcommittees is not “representativeness,” but actual “disinterest.” That is, the median member of the Appropriations subcommittee, according to the Cannon-Taber norm, should exhibit even less interest in the programs under the panel’s jurisdiction than the median of the chamber. Therefore, I provide the  $p$ -values (converted to percentages) for the reader to make her own judgment, and I offer some interpretations of my own.

Alternatively, we may also examine the overall distribution of each subcommittee’s  $p$ -values as evidence that a panel tends toward high need members versus being representative of the chamber or even composed of “disinterested.” That is, a subcommittee that is randomly populated (representative) should have an actual median need score that tends around a  $p$ -value of 50, with approximately equal number of  $p$ -values above 50 as below. A subcommittee tending toward more extreme high need (or, alternatively, disinterested) members should more often than not have  $p$ -values greater than (less than) 50.

<sup>10</sup>In two cases “lowest” values on the measure were considered to be the “highest” needers—median district income and population per square mile. In these instances the standardized scores were multiplied by  $-1$  to reverse their effect on the additive scales.

<sup>11</sup>This technique makes an important assumption that the component measures have “equal” effect on a legislator’s sense of “need” for the benefits provided by a specific subcommittee. For example, this would mean that the percent in a district employed in farming is *equally as important* in measuring need for benefits provided by the Agriculture Subcommittee as the percent living in rural-farm areas. While this is not always the case with all component measures employed here, there is no obvious means of determining proper weights.

<sup>12</sup>See Groseclose 1994 and Adler and Lapinski 1997 for descriptions as to why this particular technique is well suited for tests of preferences on congressional committees.

<sup>13</sup>Use of the *chamber* median raises the obvious question as to the appropriate body—the full chamber or the full committee—for comparison with subcommittees. Although it cannot be ignored that members first gain assignment to the full Appropriations Committee before being granted a subcommittee seat, the critical factor for testing the constituency bias of these panels is that they are unquestionably the most autonomous subcommittees in Congress. Since the early 1970s Appropriations subcommittee chairs and ranking members have been voted on by their caucuses (the only subcommittee leadership positions subjected to this external control) and the vast majority of Appropriations activities occurs in subcommittee (hearings, mark-up, etc.). Given their extensive autonomy and relationship with the entire chamber it seems appropriate to measure the bias of these panels against the distribution of floor needs.

**TABLE 2 Median Tests for House Appropriations Subcommittees, 1959–1998**

Subcommittee	Congressional Term																			
	86th 1959	87th 1961	88th 1963	89th 1965	90th 1967	91st 1969	92nd 1971	93rd 1973	94th 1975	95th 1977	96th 1979	97th 1981	98th 1983	99th 1985	100th 1987	101st 1989	102nd 1991	103rd 1993	104th 1995	105th 1997
Agriculture	99	64	81	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	99	96	99	95
Commerce, Justice, State	84	35	22	24	34	20	15	50	5	5	25	5	9	1	1	1	1	1	34	41
Defense	50	41	71	82	24	24	79	35	45	45	9	3	57	66	66	42	35	64	84	72
Energy and Water	23	23	57	72	98	81	81	61	87	63	73	3	98	98	98	98	96	30	65	65
Interior	39	22	89	73	82	82	91	100	42	83	55	53	1	40	40	40	49	56	88	85
Labor and HHS	78	78	88	94	69	69	56	30	81	97	94	59	82	39	42	42	72	4	4	1
Military Construction	74	76	99	82	87	83	87	80	98	82	92	58	90	94	97	97	88	96	68	88
Transportation					56	80	80	83	88	82	77	75	27	7	28	28	1	2	38	18
Treasury and Postal Service		24	88	93	88	98	96	75	82	54	69	65	75	98	98	59	49	31	99	99
VA, HUD, and Indep Agencies	86	86	62	72	44	42	49	40	64	25	97	95	99	98	98	92	92	50	49	40
#Sig ( $p \leq .05$ )/ Total # of committees	1/8	0/9	1/9	1/9	2/10	2/10	2/10	2/10	2/10	2/10	2/10	2/10	3/10	4/10	5/10	3/10	2/10	2/10	2/10	2/10

Note: Figures represent the percent of 10,000 randomly sampled committees whose median need score is less than the median of the actual committee in that Congress.

## Findings

Several subcommittees meet even the more stringent .05 criteria for membership with disproportionate need for the programs under their jurisdiction.<sup>14</sup> Using this level of significance, five of the ten subcommittees are preference outliers with respect to their district profiles at least 25 percent of the time. Agriculture is almost always composed of members disproportionately representing rural farming districts. Energy and Water frequently has a membership with districts that have high flood potential or are concerned with energy policy, and this is most often the case from the mid-1980s to the early-1990s. VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies are frequently comprised of members representing urban poor districts or those with extreme interest in veterans' issues—again, mostly in the 1980s. Not surprisingly, Military Construction has members who have high military populations or numerous military installations in their districts, and these extreme panels are sprinkled throughout the entire forty years of this study. Similarly, Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government also had a number of panels that were statistical outliers in terms of their concern for issues involving government employees that were spread from the 1960s to the 1990s. Additionally, with the exception of VA/HUD, the *p*-values for these subcommittees tends *not* to congregate around the “representative” level ( $p = 50$ ), but are much more often (80 percent of the time) on the high need side.

Expanding our definition of extreme committees to look for those with disproportionate leaning—for sake of argument, an actual subcommittee membership more extreme than 85 percent of the sample panels—we find that two more committees have a trend toward memberships representing relatively high need constituencies. For example, at different times during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s, Interior frequently had a membership with low population densities and a large amount of public land acreage in their state. Also Labor, HHS, and Education members in the mid-1960s and late-1970s tended to represent blue-collar areas or districts with poor public schools.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the overall constituency alignment of Appropriations subcommittees was less probable during the Cannon-Taber era than sub-

sequently. Using the .05 significance level, we find that in two of the three Cannon-Taber terms examined here,<sup>15</sup> only one subcommittee was an outlier and in one term there were zero outliers. Even when we relax our definition of high need subcommittee membership ( $p \leq .15$ ) we only begin to see trends toward more widespread outlier contingents in the last of these three terms (the 88th Congress, Interior, Labor/HHS/Education, and Treasury/Postal Service). The Cannon-Taber era also includes the only congressional terms when the consistently extreme Agriculture Subcommittee was not an outlier.

Once we move beyond the 88th Congress we find little evidence that the overall tendency of Appropriations subcommittees to attract high need representatives changes significantly no matter the level of statistical significance. Alterations such as seniority bidding for subcommittee seats or budgetary reforms in the early 1970s or the takeover by Republicans in 1995 do not lead to any significant changes in the overall trends of these panels. Almost all congressional terms have at least two subcommittees composed of members with extreme constituency needs—usually Agriculture and some other panel—along with a few others that have similar, but not quite as extreme, trends. The mid- to late-1980s represents the one period where the overall tendency of outlier panels is altered slightly: 3–5 subcommittees are outliers.

The one trend that does seem to be present with the change to Republican control in 1995 is, not surprisingly, a different set of subcommittees attracts more high need legislators. For instance, members representing military-oriented districts are more evenly distributed between Defense and Military Construction than previously—Defense becomes more extreme and Military Construction becomes less extreme. Furthermore, two panels, Commerce and Interior, experience rebounds in their high need membership at the start of the 104th Congress that neither had seen since the mid-1970s (although neither reaches the .05 level). Commerce, in particular, seems to have been a panel for which the membership for many years was largely composed of “disinterestededs.” Treasury, which had a high need membership in the mid-1980s also experiences a resurgence of such members with the Republicans take-over. Interestingly, two subcommittees, Energy & Water and VA/HUD, continue trends in 104th Congress from the previous term toward significantly less extreme memberships.

One important note is that extreme subcommittee memberships are usually not driven exclusively by one

<sup>14</sup> Large scale swings in the *p*-value of certain subcommittees at different periods (e.g., Energy and Water in the 96th–98th Congresses) are due to the relatively small size of these panels. During the early period examined, Appropriations subcommittees averaged about eight members, but have more recently tended toward twelve members. Therefore, replacement of just a few members can drastically change the subcommittee's median.

<sup>15</sup> Officially, Taber had retired at the end of the 87th Congress, and Rep. Ben Jensen (R-IA) became ranking minority member for the 88th Congress.

party's contingent. An examination of statistically extreme panels in the last five congresses (101st—105th) shows that almost always majority party representatives make up approximately the same percentage of high need members on the committee (those above the committee median) as they make up the total percentage of the entire panel's membership. For example, the majority party comprises between 62 and 64 percent of the total size of the Agriculture Subcommittee since 1989, and majority party members comprise between 57 and 70 percent of the high need members on the panel in those congressional terms. This is also the case for the outlier Energy and Water, Military Construction, and Treasury and Postal Service subcommittees. The implication of this finding is that attraction to Appropriations subcommittee by constituency needs is a bipartisan phenomenon.

## Conclusion

An examination of the constituency orientation of House Appropriations subcommittees from the late-1950s to the late-1990s reveals that members frequently gain assignment to panels of specific interest to their constituencies. This often results in subcommittees that are disproportionately composed of high needers with respect to the federal benefits under their jurisdiction. The findings confirm that distributive factors should be considered when examining the structure and behavior of the Appropriations Committee. Furthermore, the findings show that a constituency orientation to subcommittee composition has existed for several decades (at least since the end of the Cannon-Taber era) despite structural changes such as alterations in the process of subcommittee assignments, budgetary reforms, and shifts in partisan control. The implication is that even high profile institutional positions like Appropriations committee seats fall prey to the most fundamental force in congressional politics—the reelection motive. Representatives need to ensure their own reelection in order to pursue almost any other legislative goal and will frequently use even the most influential committee positions to maximize their probability of returning in the next congressional term.

By rejecting part of the “guardian” model—that Appropriations subcommittees are composed of nonadvocates—I have cast some doubt on the argument that committees, particularly Appropriations, are exclusively delegates of higher institutional authorities (the chamber or party caucus). This does not mean that other factors do not influence the behavior of members on the House Appropriations Committee. For instance, it may be that

Appropriations members are responsible for serving the needs of their party (Aldrich and Rohde 1996; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991), but that part of that duty includes providing for constituency needs, and consequently the electoral prospects, of partisan colleagues. Nevertheless, their foremost responsibility may be to ensure their own reelection.

The present analysis of committee composition has offered an alternative measure of legislator preferences from the standard ideology score. Both types of measures have their shortcomings, but the one employed here seems more appropriate for a study of the distributive notion of committee structure. Nevertheless, one major concern may be that a measure based on constituency characteristics tells us about what legislators *should be doing* rather than what they are *actually doing* as committee members. There are several ways to get at the latter issue, including returning to the question posed at the beginning, which concerns committee outputs. That is, for an aggregate-level analysis of distributive theory we should explore the extent to which appropriations legislation also reflects a distributive character.

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