

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

**Carolyn Maloney, Democrat, New York City**

- August 20, 2001—Maloney Condemns Violence in Middle East  
August 7, 2001—NYC Will Lose Millions of Dollars Because Just Like  
Florida the Bush Administration Wants the (census) Count to Stop  
August 2, 2001—Maloney Speaks to Breastfeeding Advocates in Washington

**Jack Quinn, Republican, Buffalo, New York**

- September 25, 2002—Rep. Jack Quinn Announces \$1.8M in Federal Funds  
to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport  
September 27, 2001—Rep. Jack Quinn Announces Federal Funds for Local  
Crime Fighting Technology  
September 25, 2001—Historic Rail Infrastructure Legislation Introduced  
in U.S. House

Consider the above quotes, drawn from press releases on the Web sites of two members of the United States House of Representatives. If we take these headlines as indications of legislator behavior, it is clear that there are both similarities and differences in how these two legislators present themselves to constituents. Both Reps. Maloney and Quinn are making constituents aware of their activities on behalf of the local areas they represent—Maloney is highlighting the importance of the census to New York City (headline 2), and Quinn, representing the area in and around Buffalo, New York, is focusing on obtaining funding to assist with the local problems of crime prevention and improved airline facilities (headlines 1 and 3). Both representatives are also associating themselves with the national scene, Maloney by commenting on the Middle East and the need for breastfeeding and Quinn by reference to the “landmark” railroad legislation he has sponsored.

## 2 Dilemmas of Representation

However, it is clear that the balance of “local” and “national” emphasis articulated by each of these Congress members differs significantly. Judging from these headlines, Maloney’s focus is more national, and her tone is more partisan. Even when she is advocating for local concerns—the impact of the census—she is reminding the voters of her largely Democratic congressional district of her perceptions of the partisan tactics of the Republican Party during the controversial 2000 presidential election. Though Quinn highlights railroad legislation with clear national implications, the image from these headlines is that he first and foremost is attempting to represent his constituents by boosting the economy and quality of life of the local area. In addition, though in fact a solid Republican, Quinn, in these headlines, is downplaying his partisanship, actually providing no indication of his party affiliation.

These headlines serve as concrete illustrations of some of the key themes and ideas of this project. Though the Founders, via the U.S. Constitution, built a certain degree of ambiguity and tension in delineating the complex role of “legislator” (chapter 3)—should a legislator “represent” the local and potentially parochial interests of his/her constituents, or should he or she focus on a larger and perhaps more comprehensive national picture?—the Congress literature of the 1970s and 1980s has led to the dominant impression that “all politics is local.” Members of Congress spend a good deal of time interacting with constituents, providing ombudsperson services, and working in Washington on advancing the concerns of the local folks. Heading into the 1990s and beyond, many elements of politics (partisanship, candidate recruitment practices, voter attitudes, 9/11) have changed, potentially pointing legislative behavior in a more national, and even an international, direction. Does this mean that “modern-day” representatives will bring a more national and partisan flavor as they present themselves to local constituents? What factors account for any variation in the balance of local and national emphasis, and what does this variety of home styles teach us about the concept of representation more generally?

The central question of this work focuses attention on the balance of local and national concerns as legislators present themselves to constituents. Relying on public record sources and legislator Web sites, the argument to be developed through an in-depth examination of the activities of ten legislators from a single state (see below) is severalfold. As was true in the 1970s and 1980s, members of Congress today include strong local components in their home styles. But, for even the most locally oriented legislator, national factors matter as well. The intense partisanship

characterizing the Washington scene, major national issues, and other out-of-district factors all contribute to an understanding of local politics. Even more, the worlds of the “local” and the “national” may not be as separate as they are often depicted; there appear today to be any number of, mostly (but not entirely) positive, ways by which representatives have found to connect local and national politics.

Because of this variety, it is equally important to explain why some legislators develop a more “national” focus than others. Despite the dominant trend toward more “national” attention, we need to understand the factors underlying legislator behavior and to appreciate that members of Congress may adopt alternative strategies as to how to present themselves to constituents. Hence, the title of this book, *Dilemmas of Representation*, is intended to engage the reader to think about, on the one hand, the appropriate balance of local and national emphasis in legislator presentations and, on the other, the advantages and disadvantages of the contrasting representational styles utilized by some modern-day representatives, who also turn out to comprise an interesting cast of characters.<sup>1</sup>

### *Politics in the 1970s and 1990s: Toward More National Home Styles*

As might be expected, given the above indications of member presentations of self, the starting point for the present work is Richard Fenno’s (1978) seminal book, *Home Style*. As congressional scholars well know, by highlighting the district-oriented aspects of a member’s activities, Fenno augmented scholarly conceptions of representation. Through an in-depth and “over-the-shoulder” examination of the legislator as he or she perceives the district, Fenno argued in addition to their often studied activity in Washington that “observing and listening to House members at home makes it clear that each one also pursues a career in the district” (Fenno 1978, 171).

As such, Fenno enriched the conceptualization of constituency to highlight its complexity—his well-known bulls-eye model suggests that the geographic (legal) constituency (e.g., Quinn represents the Buffalo area) that often serves as the focus of political analysis might actually be only the beginning of the story. As legislators interact with their nested sets of constituencies (geographic, reelection, primary, intimate; see chapter 2), and additionally, as they consider their own opinions and experiences, representatives make complex choices about their multifaceted presentations of self to constituents, their home styles.

#### 4 Dilemmas of Representation

For the most part, in the 1970s when Fenno wrote, these legislative choices pointed representatives homeward. Based on a qualitative analysis of the strategic situations of eighteen U.S. representatives, Fenno's main conclusion emphasized that representation starts at home. Legislators were generally fairly district focused. They and their contemporaries spent large portions of time in their districts (Fenno 1978, 57) and allocated large proportions of staff time to district-oriented activity. Members felt it necessary to know their constituents personally, to be in touch with constituent concerns and to be available to provide a variety of services. Within the district, visibility, allocation of resources, presentation of self, and continually winning and holding constituent trust were important keys to success.

In fact, Fenno's work is replete with all manner of very human stories highlighting the local: representatives re-traversing fairgrounds to demonstrate accuracy in recalling a constituent's name (Congressman A, 64), appearing before multiple audiences in short time periods (Congressman B, 70), and engaging in an astounding number of almost two hundred town meetings per year so as to interact with constituents in literally every legal jurisdiction within the district (Congressman D, 95). Further, Fenno showed that failure to engage in these kinds of personal interactions could be costly; one legislator (Congressman E), in his zeal to make a personal connection, even shook hands with someone in his own caravan of cars (109)—a faux pas indicative of a somewhat problematic home style.

At a more profound level, the members of Congress Fenno studied had incredibly strong roots in their districts. Three generations of Congressman A's family had held public office (Fenno 1978, 65), Congressman B had been the popular local boy who ran for Congress in the same way he ran for high school class president (Fenno 1978, 74), and Congressman D, who wasn't originally from the district, made it a point to develop a detailed understanding of the area's characteristics by gathering knowledge through his commitment to three district offices, "coffees," and open meetings (Fenno 1978, 93-95).

Fenno highlighted the "local" and the personal: "Viewed from this perspective, the archetypal constituent question is not 'What have you done for me lately?' but 'How have you looked to me lately?'" (Fenno 1978, 56). He adds:

Constituents may want extra policy behavior from their representatives. They may want good access or the assurance of good access as much as they

want good policy. They may want a “good man” or “a good woman,” someone whose assurances they can trust, as much as they want good policy. They may want communication promises as much as they want policy promises. (241)

Subsequent legislative scholarship has elaborated on this local view of representation. The often-documented advantages accruing to incumbents, the exigencies of candidate-centered politics and the reduced nature of presidential coattails over the last few decades all give credence to Fenno’s view of home style. For one, incumbents can be secure and safe in their districts because their congressional status gives them increased funds for trips home and expands the communication possibilities with constituents (Jacobson 2001; Mayhew 1973, 1974). The increasing importance of the ombudsperson function provides incumbents an additional set of noncontroversial activities to use as credit-claiming material with constituents (Fiorina 1977). So, the fact that winning elections seems to be due to the efforts of individual candidates and their actions within their districts rather than their partisanship, their party’s presidential success, or other national factors, means that even more depends on the representative-constituent connection (Jacobson 2001; Mann and Wolfinger 1981; Parker 1989, 1986; Ragsdale 1980). In short, incumbents have been able to utilize a wide array of resources, the franking privilege, increased staff, committee activities, etc., to cement their relationships with constituents and to secure their congressional seats.

Yet, while many of these phenomena have continued to be influential in American politics over the past two decades, major aspects of society and politics have changed. Despite “localism,” national factors are currently quite consequential in legislative life and have the potential to pose new dilemmas and choices for representatives.

At the societal level, increased geographic mobility enhances the potential that new residents to an area would naturally bring the broader perspectives of their prior socialization to their current lives. In addition, a wide variety of major corporations (hotels, restaurants, businesses) have franchises all across the nation, “homogenizing” available options and choices. Sources of nationwide television news (CNN, C-SPAN, etc.) are now available and, of course, the Internet and the World Wide Web have opened up unprecedented new communication tools for citizens and legislators alike, contributing to the potential for national and even international perspectives.

## 6 Dilemmas of Representation

More to the point, some fairly remarkable changes in the political arena have increased the potential for extra-district forces to impact local politics, often in more national and polarizing directions. Events of the 1960s and 1970s—including the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and Watergate—contributed toward a dramatic growth in public interest groups of all kinds (the women’s movement, consumerism, environmentalism, etc.), and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a more conservative “backlash” impacted modern politics. Also, it goes without saying that the horrific events surrounding 9/11 have certainly moved politics and legislative behavior in more national directions.

Consequently, the number of viable interest groups around the nation has increased dramatically as has the number of groups led by a centralized leadership originating from a Washington headquarters (Barry 1999; Polsby 2004). These groups have the potential both to nationalize some issues and to provide a training ground for politicians who could ultimately run for Congress providing a national perspective (Ehrenhalt 1991). Also, with the advent of campaign finance regulations, the creation of Political Action Committees (PACs) has meant that interest groups and organized sources of out-of-district money can be raised and spent by legislators within their individual constituencies.

Changing recruitment patterns also point in more national directions. Witness the tendency toward more policy-oriented legislators at the state level (Ehrenhalt 1991; Fenno 2000; Fiorina 2005). Witness as well the increased diversity of members of Congress, a diversity that might well point more members toward a national focus. The significant increases in the number of representatives with business backgrounds (Davidson and Oleszek 2002) along with, from a very different perspective, the increased number of women and minorities running for office mean that the makeup of Congress is very different today than it was a few decades ago. Since these members may draw attention from many parts of the country (for example, the excitement in 1992 over the particularly large freshman classes of women [Margolies-Mezvinsky 1994] and minorities [Davidson and Oleszek 2002]), and since the interests of these members and their constituents may reflect broad-based concerns reaching beyond the boundaries of their districts, many such representatives could reasonably be expected to bring a more national perspective to their home states.

Other trends in recruitment patterns also increase the potential for national perspectives among legislators. Herrnson (1994) has demonstrated

that an increasing number of Washington staffers go on to run for congressional office. Perhaps low on local district ties, these staffers may have little choice but to emphasize their national connections.

And within Congress, too, there have been major changes. Over the time Fenno was writing, more opportunities for entrepreneurship by members of Congress (an expanded subcommittee system, a decline of the apprenticeship norm, and large classes of activist members [1974 and 1992 on the Democratic side, 1980 and 1994 for the Republicans]) increased the possibilities for legislators to take initiatives in a variety of ways. While many of these changes were occurring at the very time Fenno was researching home styles, it is certainly possible that most of his work took place prior to the full impact of these changes.

Lastly, but certainly not least, the national parties play an increasing role in the lives of members (Davidson and Oleszek 2002; Jacobson 2001; Sinclair 1998). Party has become more of a force at the Washington level as witnessed by events including developments of the 104th Congress, the impeachment controversy, and the more general increase in the role of party leadership, discipline, and clout (chapter 4) (Bader 1996; Davidson and Oleszek 2002; Gimpel 1996; Rohde 1991). Even more, the national parties have come to play an increasing role in local campaigns, targeting certain congressional races as critical, assisting in the recruitment and training of candidates, and contributing significant financial help (Bullock, Shafer, and Bianco 1999; Davidson and Oleszek 2002; Fowler and McClure 1989; Jacobson 2001). As Uslaner (1993) summarizes, "Politics is now not just a serious business but a highly polarized one. Give and take has given way to non-negotiable demands" (1).

Perhaps as a consequence, recent scholarship (see chapter 2) has documented changing voter attitudes toward the local and the national. Scholars have thus demonstrated both an increasing interest in national concerns when examining voter attitudes (Jacobson 2001) and consequently an increasing "national" component to aggregate congressional election results (Fiorina 2005). The bottom line is that sociopolitical times have changed, and members of Congress are confronted with new opportunities and challenges. The political environment in which members operate includes more national, and in some cases international, elements, so forces outside a member's district have an increased potential to influence legislator district-oriented activities. Much has been learned about how these forces operate at the Washington level. In turn, the questions for this book focus attention

## 8 Dilemmas of Representation

on how these changes impact representatives' work in the local districts. What do home styles look like given the current political context? How do members of Congress integrate national level forces into their district-oriented presentations of self?

### *Project Goals and Contribution*

It is the goal of this project then to first describe the home styles of some modern-day members of Congress. Given the recent sociopolitical changes described above, there is a need to think through the ways more national elements impact what members do in their individual districts.

Put another way, current congressional scholarship has tended to focus on the national implications of national trends. Literature with a national focus, including that on responsible parties, has emphasized party leadership activity in Washington (Bader 1996; Davidson and Oleszek 2002; Gimpel 1996; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1998), roll call votes of members (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Davidson and Oleszek 2002; Smith 2000), or explications of the norms of the Washington scene such as a decline in comity (Uslaner 1993). This body of literature has added enormously to our understanding of Congress, yet there is simply a need to know more about the response of the average member working day-to-day in his or her local district to these important national trends.

The research for this work has implications for a related question: What are the connections for the individual member of Congress between activity at home and in Washington? As will become clear in chapter 2, while scholars agree that such a connection is, of course, critical, they disagree about its nature. For instance, whereas important textbooks sometimes point to very little connection between home and Washington (legislators simply engage in different activities in the diverse arenas [Davidson and Oleszek 2002]), other scholars (Fenno 1978) tend to assume negative connections. In terms of time and energy, members must make tradeoffs, and too much of a Washington focus may hurt at home.

At the same time, given today's politics, we might expect representatives to bring a more national focus to Congress. This book will argue that though in some cases the home-Washington connection may in fact be a negative one (what you do in one arena can hurt you in the other), at least in today's House of Representatives, there are indeed a surprisingly wide variety of strategies representatives can use to develop positive connections



between the local and the national. At the very least, the case studies will suggest a more complex and variable home-Washington linkage than has been commonly assumed.

A second goal of this book revolves around understanding and explaining variation. Despite trends toward nationalization, the Maloney and Quinn excerpts above make clear that some members of Congress have become more involved nationally while others have chosen to stay more locally focused. Given the more national environment of modern politics, what opportunities and constraints lead members to make alternative choices? Thus, Fenno has argued that a variety of constituency characteristics and member backgrounds explain variation in home styles. In each of the profiles to follow, I will consider the ways these factors impact each legislator's home style and also how the opportunities and constraints at the national level interact to also shape and define or constrain these presentational strategies.

Given this variation, it makes sense that this book is also about understanding and appreciating the alternative choices modern legislators make as they deal with a changing and more national representational environment. Through in-depth case studies of ten members of Congress, the project seeks to put a human face on how and why legislators make the important choices that shape their behavior. In an environment where national factors are present, how and why do some legislators choose to emphasize local or parochial concerns while others highlight more national concerns, connections, or contributions? Why have some members jumped on the "responsible party" bandwagon that has been so prevalent in the last decade or so while others have purposefully eschewed extreme partisanship? Why have some members chosen to focus on a subgroup of constituents (specific racial minorities, partisan or economic interests) while others develop a more inclusive reelection constituency which they hope will appeal to broad segments of the population?

As will become clear, an examination of each of these questions will enhance and broaden an understanding of the local-national linkage. In turn, as is also clear from these questions, such an understanding touches on many aspects of politics. Indeed, one important virtue of the case study methodology employed by Fenno and throughout this study is to highlight the many roles and activities in which members of Congress engage. That is, it is the contribution of any study of home style to highlight the variety of roles played by representatives. Legislators are busy people. Not only do they focus on policy, but they also serve as local party or group leaders and engage in a host of constituency-oriented functions. One really comes to

appreciate the human dimension of the representative-constituent linkage as well as its impact on the lives of individual citizens.

Therefore, the case studies presented below focus attention more generally on the title of this book: *Dilemmas of Representation*. Members of Congress make alternative choices about which activities to engage in within their districts. From a normative perspective, the reader is encouraged to think about which kinds of choices are best. Are the legislators profiled here providing “optimal” representation for their individual constituencies? Who is doing the best job overall, and what combination of representative styles would be best for the nation as we head into the twenty-first century?

### *Overview of the Book*

Using public record sources (see below), this book focuses on home styles in a more national environment, the choices legislators make in responding to this environment, and the consequent “dilemmas” these choices pose for constituent representation. To accomplish these goals, this work presents profiles of the home styles of ten legislators chosen from a single, though diverse, state (New York; see chapter 2 for methodology). In accord with the arguments described above, each profile details the “local” and the “national” elements of a legislator’s home style along with the factors contributing to such a style.

Each legislator profile is interesting in and of itself, and each contributes to an understanding of the local-national connection. For the purposes of highlighting the other goals of this project—the variation in legislative choices and the larger dilemmas such choices pose for representation more generally—the presentation of the legislator profiles has been organized in chapters so as to emphasize some of the changes that have taken place since the 1970s and to raise the very real dilemmas those changes pose for modern representation. After a more detailed discussion as to the theory and methodology of this work (chapter 2), each of the four case study chapters makes a contribution to an examination of the following concerns:

To begin, can home styles include notable national elements? The profiles of Representatives Maloney and Houghton presented in chapter 3 demonstrate that in addition to the localism highlighted by the legislative literature of the 1970s, national elements indeed have the potential to play an important role in some home styles. The advantages and disadvantages of

such representational styles become even more apparent when these two legislators are contrasted with the presentation of self of a more locally oriented representative. John McHugh not only has the electoral freedom to “go national” but also represents a constituency in many respects similar to the area represented by Congressman Houghton. However, McHugh has chosen to focus primarily on concerns that reflect dominant local interests. Thus, the chapter examines the factors contributing to the different responses of these three legislators.

In addition, all members of Congress must deal with the increasingly partisan context of Washington. Chapter 4 adds to our appreciation of the “national” by demonstrating the tradeoffs made by three congresspeople as they develop home styles that attempt to balance increased national partisanship with constituent needs and their own personal concerns. Thus, early on to her advantage but later to her detriment, Republican Sue Kelly jumped on the “responsible party” bandwagon of 1994. Previously loyal Democrat Michael McNulty, similarly confronted with the increasingly conservative tide, was also perceived as jumping on the 1995 Republican bandwagon and therefore as jumping ship not only from his party but also from important segments of his constituency. In contrast, Representative Carolyn McCarthy has developed a home style that has been steadfastly nonpartisan in nature. Thus, confronted with a similar national and partisan environment, these three members of Congress exhibited varying responses to the trend toward increasingly responsible national parties.

Switching gears, chapter 5 highlights a very different national trend, the increasing population diversity across the United States and hence the increasing tendency toward multiethnic or multiracial congressional districts. Because of their extremely diverse constituencies, Representatives Engel and Velazquez face some fairly unique representational challenges; since Rep. Engel highlights constituency service and the commonalities among distinct groups, while Velazquez emphasizes issues of empowerment and difference, their profiles indicate contrasting responses to important changes in American demographics, responses that, as we shall see, also have important implications for the local-national distinction.

Finally, if chapter 3 highlighted ways to “go national,” the last two profiles (chapter 6) of Representatives Jack Quinn and Maurice Hinchey return us full circle to Fenno’s work, focusing on the continued existence of tensions prevalent at the local level and a congressperson’s consequent efforts to balance reelection and primary constituencies. However, as we shall see, even here in two cases where home styles are primarily local,

## 12 Dilemmas of Representation

national factors enter in. The national agenda has shaped aspects of the behavior of both these members, and at times, each has been thrust in the national spotlight. In addition, the larger context of a declining economy in both districts has impacted what these members of Congress have chosen for their respective foci of attention, highlighting the importance of extra-district concerns and events.

In sum, as the concluding chapter and the postscript will highlight, in the current political environment, there are more ways than there were in the 1970s for national factors to impact local districts. The changes that have occurred since Fenno's initial work have the potential to pose new challenges for modern-day representatives as they attempt to integrate local and national concerns. By engaging in the conceptualization and profiles to follow, the reader will be better able to think through the implications of connections between local and national politics.