Mayhem and Fenno Approach on Congress

Institutional Affiliation

Date

In seeking to understand what drives the Members of Congress, we consider the two arguments given by Mayhew and Fenno. According to Mayhew, he suggests that the Members of the Congress (MCs) usually are only driven by the factor of being re-elected. To him, re-election incentive is the ultimate and only goal that the MCs have all the time. He goes ahead to state that for them to achieve this, they engage in three primary activities that include: position-taking, credit claiming and advertising. He also explains that the sole intention of re-election means that the concentration is more on the individual. The individual has the power to control the outcome of the elections whether the primary elections or the general elections. Fenno, on the other hand, states that members of the Congress usually have a list of three things that they want to achieve. The first being re-election, good publicity and power. They are aware that they first have to attain re-election to be able to accomplish the other goals. For achievement of re-election, the homestyle is used then trust, perfectionist and expansionist phases. They strive to achieve this regardless of the changes that have been taking place in the home styles.

In consideration of the two views by Fenno and Mayhem, i would say that the view that best accounts for the actions of the Members of the Congress is the approach stated my Fenno. Fenno reports that the purpose of the Members of the Congress is usually based on more goals than re-election. The other targets include achievement of power in the Congress and sound public policies. In the approach by Mayhem, it concentrates more on the individual which means it is the achievements of the MCs themselves as people. In Fenno’s approach, however, it focuses on all the persons including the people. It is what the MCs have to offer to the members of the public. The people elect leaders with regards to what they can do for them. The other two goals apart from re-election, therefore, concentrate on the public. That is public policy and power in the Congress which can enable them to push agendas that are in favour of their constituents.

This is why they engage in the home-style which is first supposed to help them get re-elected making the attainment of the other goals and visions that they have attainable. The MCs have to gain the trust of their constituents. After they earn the trust, they will be able to explain most of the decisions made in the Congress to their constituents, and they will understand. The trust will be created through the developments that are brought about in the district itself. If an MCs is quick to make decisions in Washington than the events that he has back home in the district, there will be no trust. They are aware that the districts contain the voters and that it is they that he was elected to represent. MCs also keep in mind that it is the constituents that have the power to keep them in the office or not during re-election. They must receive something in return if they are to elect you once more. One also has to ensure that they have a good advisor and a good support system like family friends and advisers. They expand their support system and later concentrate on perfecting the bond and trust with the supporters that exist. The challenges faced over time are that the districts have become bigger hence the difficulty in meeting all the constituents and having personal interactions with all of them. The society has also become more suburban and atomised.

In support of their decisions, we find that the members that operate on Mayhem’s view of re-election are usually not re-elected back into Congress as their main concentration is individualistic and do not implement any policies. They only concentrate on advertising themselves by attending ceremonies and giving speeches. They also claim credits that they have not participated in or helped develop and keep taking positions such that instead of bringing change policy they support the popular opinion. Such MCs are not re-elected. There is evidence as of the number of members of Congress that did not run for re-election over the periods of time whereas others resigned due to misconduct. Those that use the Fenno approach are elected for second, third and even four terms in office since as much as they concentrate on re-election they are also keen on policies and attaining power in the Congress.

I believe that it is okay for a Member of Congress to pursue their interest in the democracy. We all have interests and agendas that we would like to achieve. As much as one may have the constituents of his district at heart one has to ensure that their interests are taken care off. If one is at peace with their issues, then they can be able to bring about development to the members of the district. This is the reason why Mayhem and Fenno agree that re-election is the primary goal for the MCs. As per Mayhem the only goal and to Fenno the first goal then followed by the rest.

Yes, I do believe that this is what James Madison meant when he stated that “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.” Madison saw that there was a need for checks and balances to control leaders whose main agenda was their own by ensuring that they were re-elected back into Congress each time even though they were making no developments in their districts. He identified that there was a need for each department to be free from the interference by others. This is why we can see a member of Congress sued on issues of misconduct resigning as the judiciary can as easily take action. When he stated that “if men were angels” there would be no need for governance he was right. However, since they are not hence the need for laws that govern those elected to represent the constituents to ensure that they do not oppress and misuse the office. This is the reason why the people also have the supreme power of voting, where they elect the leaders that best suit them.

**References**

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