

PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES AND THE STAGES OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

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Presidents go public frequently to increase their success in Congress. Yet scholars know little about when presidents speak within the legislative process or why. If presidential speeches are indeed a source of power for presidents, then presidents are likely to use them throughout the legislative process, not speak only to affect final passage. We argue that presidents speak generally to meet broad electoral and political goals, but target speeches according to their goals at each stage of the legislative process: to frame the debate at the agenda-setting stage, to push bills out of committee, and to finalize support from legislators at the roll call stage. We analyze 116 bills between 1989 and 2004, supplemented by Bush Library archival data and a case study of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. The results illustrate that presidents speak mostly at the agenda-setting and roll call stages and presidential attention at each stage varies by informational cues provided by the larger political environment.

Since Ronald Reagan asked the American people to contact their legislators to support his tax and spending cut proposals, scholars have wondered about the impact that presidential speeches have on presidential success in Congress. In his seminal work, using the Reagan example to illustrate a change in presidential-congressional relations, Samuel Kernell (1997) argued that faced with divided, gridlocked, and more decentralized Congresses less amendable to bargaining, presidents “go public” and use their speeches to build support for their legislative agendas. Since then, we have seen an explosion of such efforts by presidents, whether through national addresses as Reagan used, by speaking frequently and repeatedly about a policy to targeted groups, or by traveling around the nation to advertise the president’s policy priorities with the intent of increasing success in Congress (Cohen 2010). These strategies benefit presidents, as speeches increase their success rate on roll call

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votes (Barrett 2004; Canes-Wrone 2006; Eshbaugh-Soha 2006). Whether because they fear reelection defeat or respond to the informational cues speeches provide, legislators have clear incentives to respond to presidential speeches. Presidents have numerous incentives to speak throughout the legislative process, including to achieve their policy goals or position themselves for a successful reelection campaign.

Although imperative to our understanding of presidential leadership, this previous line of research focuses predominately on whether presidential speeches increase success on roll call votes. It does not examine whether presidents vary their speechmaking according to three primary stages of a complex legislative process: agenda-setting, committee, and roll call vote stages. This is so even though Congress deliberates at more than just final passage, providing presidents with numerous opportunities to speak about legislation. As purposive actors intent on achieving their legislative goals, presidents may speak specifically to shape the parameters of the debate in Congress, help push legislation out of committee, persuade recalcitrant legislators to vote in the president's favor, or some combination of these. The purpose of this article is to determine when in the legislative process presidents speak based on these legislative goals.

This article will answer the following questions. In what stages of the legislative process do presidents target bills with their public speeches and what factors predict presidential speechmaking at different legislative stages? What is the purpose of presidential speechmaking at the several legislative stages? Or, why do presidents, speak when they speak? To answer these questions, we systematically examine speeches as they relate to legislation from 1989–2004 to see whether presidents target their speeches at specific stages and what explains the president's public attention at those stages. We then support our quantitative findings with a case study on the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 based on archival data from the George Herbert Walker Bush presidential library. Despite research that suggests otherwise (Burnam 2010), President Bush spoke frequently on his clean air proposal with the intent of securing its passage.

Examining presidential speechmaking at the various stages of the legislative process is crucial to understanding more fully presidential leadership of Congress. The legislative process is not relegated to the discrete roll call vote that scholars have heretofore examined. It is a continuous process, one in which the agenda-setting and committee stages are central to a bill's passage or failure. We treat the legislative process as such. By examining presidential speechmaking at several stages of the legislative process, this article adds to our understanding of the relationship between presidents and Congress. If presidents target primarily roll call votes, we may conclude that presidents are concerned mostly with legislative victory regardless of the nature of the policy debate. However, if presidents speak predominately at the agenda-setting stage, presidents may be most concerned about shaping the debate and setting the foundation for increased legislative success on the substance of policy. Examining the committee stage is also important as effectively targeting

this stage may encourage legislators to act on the substance of the president's policy priorities.

PRESIDENTIAL ATTENTION AT THREE LEGISLATIVE STAGES

The president's rationale for speaking at each of the primary stages of the legislative process—agenda setting, committee, and roll call vote—is contingent upon the president's goals and the potential costs and benefits of using a public relations strategy to achieve them. Overall, presidents engage in a permanent campaign and speak frequently to achieve three broad goals: good public policy, reelection, and historical achievement (Light 1999). It is unquestioned that presidents strategize and go public most effectively over legislation on those issues already popular with the American people (Canes-Wrone 2006). Not lost on presidents is the additional benefit that speechmaking may have on the president's efforts to run and win reelection as many efforts at going public intend to fulfill campaign promises made during election campaigns. Even though we focus our argument on the president's legislative goals for why he speaks at each legislative stage, the president's goal of reelection is part and parcel to the president's speaking strategy and is likely to pervade all of his public speeches.

Presidents have distinct motivations to speak at different stages. Speeches delivered during the agenda-setting stage intend to frame the debate; speeches delivered when a bill is bottled up in committee are used to grease the wheels and push legislators to vote the bill out of committee; and speeches targeted at the roll call stage are designed to secure final passage. In addition, determining whether issuing public appeals will assist in the president's goals achievement is contingent upon the perceived costs and benefits of doing so. The benefits to public speaking are clear: they may set the policy agenda (Kingdon 1995), expand the scope of conflict and push legislators to action (Kernell 1997), or raise public awareness (Cohen 1995), which contributes to the president's success on legislation (Canes-Wrone 2006). The costs, however, are also numerous. Presidents go public on policies central to their policy agendas and legacy. Failure to achieve victory after expending considerable time and energy can hurt the president's reputation or prestige (Neustadt 1990) or contribute to negative news coverage (Cohen 2008), which may depress public support (Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch 1995). Not only are there these transaction costs to public speechmaking, there are also opportunity costs: if the president goes public on one policy priority, he may be precluded from going public on another. The choice of which policies to target and when may be crucial to the outcome of the president's legislative agenda.

Whether presidents perceive benefits from going public is contingent upon *how* speeches may influence legislators. After all, presidents can speak endlessly about policies, but if a legislator does not receive these speeches, any impact will be negligible. We think that two theoretical frames help explain why presidents may choose to issue public appeals.¹ First, cue theory holds that legislators view

speeches as information short cuts, which provide them with information they need to make relatively informed decisions in a complex environment (Kingdon 1981). The more the president speaks about an issue, the easier it is for legislators to ascertain the president's position and decide whether they will support or oppose him. Legislators are especially likely to use information short cuts with the more uncertain they are about how to vote, much as legislators use the president's approval rating as an informational cue in their vote choices absent strong signals from their constituents (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002). Therefore, presidents are likely to issue more public appeals when conditions suggest that legislators are most likely to need them. Second, presidents will speak publicly when private bargaining proves ineffective in securing the president's goals. By going public, presidents can expand the scope of conflict, bringing into the fight other groups, constituents, or legislators who may have been willing to let the president's priorities fail (see Kernell 1997; Schattschneider 1960). This approach has the added benefit of allowing presidents to target key electoral constituencies by prioritizing policies favorable to them in their speeches. In short, presidents who are likely to target a legislative stage when speaking can inform and thus reduce legislators' uncertainty about an issue, or can expand the scope of conflict to increase their chances for success. Although we argue that presidents typically speak when conditions otherwise preclude success, the motivation and potential benefit to presidents vary by legislative stage.

Agenda-setting Stage

A president's motivation for speaking at the agenda-setting stage is clear: setting the agenda is a primary vehicle for power and influence in American politics, and is often the purview of presidents (Kingdon 1995). By setting the agenda or "framing the definition of alternatives" (Schattschneider 1960, 68), presidents influence the "boundaries of the political debate" (Light 1999, 2) in Congress. Each year, legislators listen to presidential priorities and consider most of them (Edwards and Barrett 2000). Others maintain that Congress needs the president's agenda (Neustadt 1990) to overcome its collective action problems that lead to stalemate and gridlock (Moe 2003). Bond and Fleisher (1990, 230) argue, too, that the president's greatest influence in Congress may be "the agenda he pursues and the way it is packaged," with some evidence that presidential agenda items are more likely to pass Congress (Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney 1995). Although Edwards and Wood (1999) show only that presidential attention increases congressional committee hearing days devoted to education policy, presidential attention to civil rights, clean air, and domestic farm policies increases committee attention to these policy areas (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2004).

Thus, presidents have much reason to target the agenda-setting stage of the legislative process with their public speeches. Influencing the agenda stage provides the obvious benefit of enhancing the president's prospects for achieving his legislative goals, a necessary first step to win in Congress (Edwards and Barrett 2000). Speaking to set the agenda is arguably the strongest informational cue that

presidents can send to legislators. Setting the agenda may reduce legislators' uncertainty about a president's commitment to a policy, which encourages legislators to place it prominently on the legislative agenda and work to enact it. Agenda setting may have the added benefit of convincing the opposition not to challenge the president's priorities (Beckman 2008; 2010) or allowing presidents to meet policy expectations of their electoral coalition. In short, presidents are likely to devote more attention to a public policy at the agenda stage to reduce legislators' uncertainty about presidents' policy positions, their commitment to policy priorities, and to establish a foundation for legislative success.²

Committee Stage

A president's primary motivation to speak at the committee stage is to help push a bill out of committee, as evidenced by committees' several roles. First, as informational entities (Krehbiel 1991), committees provide cues to legislators to assist in their decision making (Matthews and Stimson 1975). If presidents can affect this stage of deliberation, they may not only increase their success on legislative victories, they may also ensure that the bill that exits committee—and eventually becomes law—is most reflective of their policy preferences. Second, committees have power to rewrite, amend, or otherwise alter legislation, and may limit discussion to an up or down vote. Committees are also especially adept at blocking the progress of legislation (Kingdon 1981, 141), something that presidential speeches may depress. Third, committees have a gate-keeping power. They decide whether the bill will exit to the floor of Congress and the bill's content (Denzau and MacKay 1983). Presidential speeches that influence decision making at this stage may encourage legislators to vote to send a bill to the floor for debate, a necessary step toward eventual success on that bill. After all, a successful going public strategy may "expand the scope of conflict" putting pressure on the committee from not only the president, but also from constituents, interest groups, or fellow legislators. Presidents will use their speeches strategically and selectively to affect the committee stage. This means that if a bill is progressing as the president wishes in committee, then he is unlikely to speak about it. Presidents are likely to target the committee stage, however, when a bill has been delayed in committee and needs to be pushed out.³

Roll Call Stage

The roll call vote stage of the legislative process may be most important to the fate of the president's legislative agenda. It is at this stage, after all, where presidents face most clearly the prospect of victory or defeat. Given the potential hit to a president's reputation or public prestige if he loses (Neustadt 1990), and the benefits to presidents who may claim credit for legislative successes—whether solving public problems or keeping campaign promises—the president is rational to target this high-profile stage with public rhetoric to increase a bill's chances for victory (Barrett 2004).

Although many legislators will have decided how to vote months prior to a roll call vote—due to their party affiliation or ideology—legislators who remain uncertain will scramble for information to make a final decision. Thus, the number of speeches at this stage should be explained by those factors that are likely to provide the margin for victory or defeat for the president. Much as approval ratings act as informational short cuts to legislators who do not have clear signals from their constituents (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002), so too can the president's public rhetoric provide legislators with information they need to make a final decision at the roll call stage when political conditions do not favor presidential success. When conditions (such as divided government or low approval ratings) otherwise reduce the likelihood for success, presidents may speak for the added benefit of expanding the scope of conflict and altering the motivation for some legislators who may be predisposed to oppose the president's policy. For these reasons, presidents are likely to devote substantial attention to legislation at the roll call vote stage of the legislative process, especially when political conditions do not portend legislative victory.

WHAT AFFECTS PRESIDENTIAL ATTENTION BY STAGE?

Our theoretical discussion promotes a number of factors that may influence the amount of public attention presidents devote to bills during three legislative stages. Mainly, when political conditions promote greater uncertainty in legislators' vote decisions or when they require presidents to speak more to expand the scope of conflict, presidents will issue more public appeals. Typically, this means that favorable political conditions will be inversely related to the number of presidential speeches at each stage of the legislative process except the committee stage, to which presidents will turn only as a bill languishes in committee.

The President's Honeymoon

The presidential honeymoon is a unique and favorable time for presidents to achieve their policy goals. Following the euphoria of an election victory, the media, public, and even Congress are most receptive to the president (Dominguez 2005). Given their motivation to send signals or expand the scope of conflict, presidents are unlikely to deliver more speeches during their honeymoon. Because the honeymoon period already provides legislators with other favorable cues and reasons to support the president's agenda, presidents are wise to save their speeches for bills debated in less favorable political climates. That presidents tend to have larger policy agendas during their honeymoon period presents opportunity costs to presidents, as well, so that they may speak more frequently overall, but speak less on any individual issue. For these reasons, the honeymoon period will result in fewer public appeals on individual bills.

Presidential Approval

The president's level of public support is related to the president's tendency to speak publicly. For example, presidential approval ratings affect the president's affinity

for public speaking (Eshbaugh-Soha 2010a; Hager and Sullivan 1994; Ragsdale 1984) and contribute to a large policy agenda (Eshbaugh-Soha 2005; Light 1999). According to our theoretical frame, a favorable political environment will encourage presidents to save their energy and devote fewer resources to speechmaking and, thus, presidential approval ratings should vary inversely with the president's level of speechmaking. In other words, because high approval ratings signify a favorable political environment for the president, they alone signal that it may be in a legislator's best interest to support the president (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002) and so popular presidents will not need to deliver additional speeches to give legislators reason to support their policies. Lower approval ratings send a negative signal to legislators, however. Thus, an unpopular president will need to compensate by sending alternative informational cues to build support in Congress (Eshbaugh-Soha 2010b). That is, the less popular the president is the more he will speak about bills before Congress.

Divided Government

Scholars have long held that divided government affects presidential speechmaking (Hart 1987; Kernell 1997; but see Powell 1999 who finds no impact). This should be no different for presidents' tendency to speak about bills before Congress. Theoretically, presidents are most likely to speak, to send informational cues when circumstances are unfavorable. When the president's party controls Congress, he has a stronger base of party support and should achieve his goals while expending less public effort. Conversely, when the president is in the minority, he will have to send additional public signals about his policy positions or otherwise expand the scope of conflict by going public (Kernell 1997) to build support from legislators of both political parties.

Duration

Duration matters to the president's speechmaking strategy at key stages. Obviously, the more time a bill remains at one legislative stage, the more time presidents have to address it. More important, the longer it takes a bill to move from one stage to the next, the more likely presidents may be compelled to go public to encourage legislators to act, especially at the committee stage. Although it takes little effort for presidents to place their policy priorities on the legislative agenda (Edwards and Barrett 2000), bills often die in committee and so presidents are wise to speak about legislation that languishes in committee. The president's goal in speaking at the committee stage is to grease the wheels, and so we hypothesize a positive relationship between bill duration and presidential attention at the committee stage. We control for duration at the roll call vote stage, too.

Presidential Initiatives and Important Legislation

Presidents care most about their own policy priorities. As such, they are more likely to dedicate their own limited time and resources to their own top priorities. They tend

to receive more of what they want on the substance of their own proposals before Congress (Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha 2007) after all, given their tendency to spend capital to shape the initial terms of the debate on their own proposals. Presidents regularly take positions on congressional proposals but since these issues are already on the legislative agenda, they are most likely to emphasize their own initiatives at the agenda-setting stage. Presidents should continue to target their own initiatives at other stages, given the central importance of their own proposals to their policy and legacy records. Given the likelihood that presidents will treat their initiatives differently than Congress' (Barrett 2004), we examine separately what affects presidential speechmaking by legislative stage on presidential initiatives alone.

Important legislation is, by definition, most high profile and central to the legislative process. It tends to be of top concern for voters, as they have been coded to be important based on the attention major newspapers devote to them (Mayhew 1991). Although these bills include both presidential and congressional initiatives, all important bills are especially likely to encourage presidential speechmaking at all legislative stages, including the agenda-setting stage (Edwards and Barrett 2000). Presidents can benefit by supporting any important bill, or speaking out against one to gain electoral support from their core constituents, given the higher salience of these issues, according to Mayhew's (1991) coding scheme. The costs to presidents losing on important bills are also high and, as such, presidents will take care to communicate their commitment to an important bill's passage more so than they will other bills.⁴

Reelection Years

Presidents have different reasons to speak at the various stages of the legislative process, but these incentives should be tempered by reelection years. Although presidents speak frequently during reelection years (Eshbaugh-Soha 2010a; Hager and Sullivan 1994), these are primarily campaign-style speeches. And generally, presidents will deliver fewer policy-based speeches as a result. Without question, their campaign speeches will claim credit for successes—and even criticize Congress when the opportunity arises—but with a change in focus, from legislative to party leader, presidents should deliver fewer speeches at each stage of the legislative process during reelection years.

DATA

This exposition required two primary data collection efforts. First, we compiled a list of key votes on which the president took a public position from the House of Representatives between 1989 and 2004, available through yearly editions of *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. We identified each bill associated with the key vote and then used the Almanac, *Congressional Quarterly Weekly*, and thomas.gov to backtrack these bills through the legislative process noting the dates of introduction,

committee entry and exit, conference committee vote, and final vote passage. In the rare instance that a bill was also vetoed, we include any veto override votes too. This sample of votes is broad in that it includes not only important legislation that passed (Mayhew 1991) and failed to pass (Edwards, Barrett, and Peake 1997), it also contains bills not identified by these scholars, as well as both congressional and presidential initiatives.

Second, we collected data on presidential speeches. To do this, we created a list of key words associated with each bill and typically covering the 12 months prior to the date of each key vote; we counted the number of paragraphs in which the president mentions his position on the bill or otherwise urges Congress to take action on it.⁵ We draw our sample for the entire universe of speeches, whether national addresses, remarks with reporters, or campaign stops. If there was a change in presidential administration, we truncated speeches at the beginning of each presidency. It makes little sense to include Bush's remarks about family leave in late 1992, for example, to predict a roll call vote in early 1993 when President Clinton was president. Speeches are found in the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessible through the American Reference Library CD-rom until 1998 and online as provided by the Government Printing Office and the American Presidency Project.

Using this sample of paragraphs, we then divided them by stage in the legislative process, identified through the online legislative database, *thomas.gov*. The agenda-setting stage is first. For our purposes, a presidential paragraph occurred at the agenda-setting stage if the president spoke prior to the bill being introduced in Congress. We identified the committee stages based on the legislative histories provided by *thomas.gov*. If the president spoke while the bill was in standing committee—that is, between its introduction in committee and its referral outside of committee—then we coded these paragraphs as having occurred during the committee stage of the legislative process. CQ and *thomas.gov* clearly identify roll call votes for final passage as well, and any speeches that occur after committee exit and before votes on final passage are coded during the final passage stage of the legislative process for a particular bill. At times, the committee and final votes are within days or weeks of each other. When there is little separation between the two, we defer to the decision rule of previous research which surmises that presidential speeches will affect the roll call vote stage of the legislative process.⁶

We are interested not only in the distribution of presidential attention by stage, but also in what might predict the president's level of attention at different stages of the legislative process. The key variables are coded as follows, with the bill as the unit of analysis. First, we take the president's approval rating from the Gallup Poll reading prior to the beginning of each stage. Second, we have identified bills that have been initiated by the president, as provided by Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha (2007), and updated by the authors, and account for important bills identified by Mayhew (1991) and Edwards, Barrett, and Peake (1997). Next, we model several other variables, including divided government, coded 1 if the president's party controls Congress and 0 otherwise and the president's honeymoon period, coded

1 during the president's first year in office. We control for presidential reelection years, coded 1 or 0. Finally, we count the number of weeks that a bill is in committee and the number of weeks between being voted out of committee and the roll call vote to measure duration.

FINDINGS

As this article provides an initial look into presidential attention by legislative stage, we first discuss Table 1, which presents some descriptive statistics by legislative stage and reveals several important points. First, the agenda-setting stage is by far the stage to which presidents devote the most attention, with a total of 3,309 paragraphs associated with the policy area considered by the bill, or an average of 29.3 paragraphs per number of bills in the sample. The modal category is 0, with 42 bills or about 36% of the sample receiving no attention at all by presidents at the agenda-setting stage. Examining the level of attention on bills to which presidents devoted at least one paragraph produces an average of 45 paragraphs per bill. Compared with the other stages, 49% of presidents' speeches were devoted to the agenda-setting stage of the legislative process. This includes some significant variation by president, with George H. W. Bush barely attending to bills early in the process (with a measly 9% commitment) to George W. Bush devoting nearly all of his public rhetoric to bills at the agenda-setting stage (82%).

At the committee stage, presidents were much more selective, offering fewer remarks than the other stages overall. Moreover, presidents only spoke publicly about issues in committee on 28 bills, delivering a total of 789 paragraphs at the committee stage. This translates to about 1% of the sample and an average of about

TABLE 1. Presidential Attention by Legislative Stage and President

Stage	Total Paragraphs	Average per bill	Bills receiving no attention	Proportion by Stage
Agenda Setting	3309	29.3	42	49%
GHW Bush	111	5.8	9	9
Clinton	1407	27.1	21	35
GW Bush	1791	39.8	12	82
Committee	789	6.8	88	12
GHW Bush	165	8.7	11	13
Clinton	598	11.5	39	15
GW Bush	26	0.6	38	1
Roll Call Vote	2613	22.5	29	39
GHW Bush	1027	54.1	4	79
Clinton	1965	37.8	10	49
GW Bush	379	8.4	15	17
<i>N</i> = 116	6711			

Source: Data collected by the authors from various sources identified in the text. Total number of bills for each president: GHW Bush (19), Clinton (52), and GW Bush (45).

28 paragraphs per bill that the president devotes at least one paragraph to at the committee stage. Of these, presidents devoted fewer than five paragraphs to 12 bills. Many of these paragraphs, 411 to be precise, were devoted to the committee stage for the 1994 omnibus crime bill. Consistent with Clinton's style, many of these were broad calls in support of the primary features of the crime bill, rather than explicit efforts to "call out" Congress, much as President George H. W. Bush preferred. Relative to their total attention at the committee stage, Presidents Bush and Clinton are comparable, devoting 13% and 15% of their total paragraphs respectively to the committee stage.

More like the agenda-setting than committee stage of the legislative process, presidents devoted 2,613 paragraphs or just over 39% to the roll call stage, averaging 22.5 paragraphs per bill. Once again, the modal category is zero speeches per bill; but presidents spoke more frequently at final passage than any other stage. Presidents did not address an issue before Congress on only 29 bills. Devoting at least one paragraph to 87 bills, therefore, presidents averaged just over 30 paragraphs for these bills. The difference between the agenda-setting stage and roll call stage is an issue of frequency. Presidents have fewer items on top of their agendas, yet they take positions on more votes before Congress. This helps explain why George H. W. Bush devoted much more of his resources to the roll call (79%) than agenda-setting stage (9%) of the legislative process.

The Determinants of Presidential Speechmaking

To explain presidential attention by legislative stage, we produce several negative binomial count models in Table 2, with the dependent variables being the number of paragraphs by stage of the legislative process. We use a negative binomial regression analysis because we cannot be certain that each speech is independent or that the speeches have a constant rate of occurrence (King 1998, 51). Indeed, it is

TABLE 2. The Determinants of Presidential Paragraphs by Legislative Stage

	Agenda Stage	Committee Stage	Roll Call Stage
Presidential Approval	-0.05* (0.01)[-4.6]	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.05* (0.01)[-4.8]
Divided Government	-0.74* (0.34)[-52.2]	-0.08 (1.10)	0.39 (0.32)
Presidential Initiative	1.10* (0.28)[+200.0]	-0.14 (0.86)	1.02* (0.39)[+176.0]
Important	1.64* (0.38)[+419.8]	2.00* (0.73)[+141.1]	0.67* (0.34)[+95.1]
Honeymoon	-1.00* (0.38)[-63.1]	-0.02 (0.96)	-0.14 (0.42)
Reelection Year	-1.34* (0.57)[-73.8]	-2.43* (0.79)	-1.26* (0.51)[-71.5]
Duration		0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)
Constant	4.93* (0.94)	0.80 (3.05)	4.91* (0.87)
Wald χ^2	41.33*	20.06*	33.10*
N	116	116	116

* $p < .05$ (one-tailed)

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; percentage change in expected number of paragraphs in brackets.

likely that all speeches are interrelated, further suggesting that a negative binomial model is appropriate. Most important, the likelihood ratio test for alpha in each model provides significant evidence of over dispersion, and thus justifies for this approach.

Table 2 reveals, consistent with our theory, that several unfavorable conditions increase presidential attention to a bill. First, lower presidential approval ratings at both the agenda-setting and roll call vote stages encourage presidents to deliver more speeches to offset the negative information a lower approval rating already sends to legislators. When presidents are less popular, in other words, they need to send positive signals to counter negative information conveyed by low approval ratings by delivering more speeches at both the agenda and roll call stages. Second, divided government produces divergent findings. Although not conventionally significant at the roll call vote stage, presidents deliver more speeches when the opposite political party controls Congress, consistent with our argument that presidents will deliver more speeches in the face of unfavorable circumstances. At the agenda-setting stage, however, conditions of divided government discourage speech making. Third, the president's honeymoon contributes to fewer speeches, but only at the agenda-setting stage. The tendency to speak less at the beginning of their tenure suggests that presidents are unwilling to expend limited resources making speeches when their honeymoon already presents a favorable environment within which to lead Congress. It may also be, as we surmised, that presidents have opportunity costs at the beginning of their terms in office. With numerous policies to attend to, presidents may speak more overall, but less on any one piece of legislation. Finally, a bill's importance increases substantially the amount of presidential attention at both the agenda-setting and roll call vote stages. This is logical as presidents will want to devote more attention to bills that are important because these bills are likely to have greater payoff to the president if they pass, and larger costs if they fail.

Contrary to our expectations, duration does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance at either the committee or roll call stages. We had argued that as a bill languishes in committee it would encourage the president to deliver more speeches at the committee stage to put public pressure on legislators to work more quickly. Consistent with the percentages and counts in Table 1, nevertheless, these findings imply that if presidents are to influence legislation at the committee stage, they are unlikely to do so publicly but rather will use private means, such as legislative liaison or personal conversations to do so. The positive coefficient is suggestive of a possible relationship on some bills, at least.

A final regularity of these findings is that presidents deliver more speeches on their own initiatives at both the agenda-setting and roll call stages. As such, there may be different dynamics at work for the president's own initiatives. But at both stages, according to the results presented in Table 3, the president acts similarly whether he speaks about all initiatives or his own. At the agenda-setting stage, presidents still speak more about their initiatives when they are also important bills and less when their approval ratings are high, during conditions of divided government,

TABLE 3. The Determinants of Presidential Paragraphs on Presidential Initiatives

	Agenda Stage	Roll Call Stage
Presidential Approval	-0.06* (0.02)[-5.9]	-0.08* (0.02)[-6.9]
Divided Government	-0.83* (0.45)[-56.5]	0.67 (0.82)
Important	1.95* (0.39)[+600.8]	0.73 (0.70)
Honeymoon	-1.44* (0.45)[-76.4]	-0.55 (0.69)
Reelection Year	-2.72* (0.55)[-93.4]	-4.87* (1.01)[-99.2]
Duration		0.001 (0.12)
Constant	6.98* (1.25)	7.54* (1.13)
Wald χ^2	69.43*	33.36*
N	32	32

* $p < .05$ (one-tailed)

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; percentage change in expected number of paragraphs in brackets.

honeymoon period, and reelection years. Although the political environment does not cause the same fluctuations in the propensity of presidents to speak about their own initiatives at the roll call stage as at the agenda-setting stage, presidents still speak less about their own initiatives when they are popular and when they are speaking during campaign season, at the roll call vote stage. Nevertheless, presidents do not speak any more about important than unimportant bills. What matters here is that the president will speak at the roll call stage for all of his initiatives, regardless of how important they are.⁷

THE CLEAN AIR ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1990: A CASE STUDY

We supplement our quantitative analysis with a case study of presidential attention associated with the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. This bill was selected for numerous reasons. First, it was one of President Bush's top domestic priorities, it is complex, and was debated during conditions of divided government. This ensures that we have something to explain and allows us to tap available archival data to supplement our discussion of key influences on presidential speechmaking. Second, the richness of archival data may add much context to the decisions and justifications made by the president and his advisers to speak publicly at the three stages of the legislative process. Third, it allows us to examine a claim that President Bush did not go public on clean air (Burnam 2010), adding to our understanding of going public as a governing strategy. Indeed, President Bush used his speeches varyingly but effectively across three stages of the legislative process until he signed the Clean Air Act Amendments into law on November 15, 1990.

Agenda-setting Stage

President Bush made clean air a top domestic priority upon taking office. He spoke early and often about this issue, beginning with his first address to a joint

session of Congress on February 9, 1989.⁸ Although the president never delivered a national address on clean air, he formally announced his proposal on June 12, 1989, symbolically in front of the Grand Teton Mountains. An initial motivation for these public pronouncements was electoral. A May 2, 1989 memo on a “proposed major presidential address on the environment” (#11716) reveals the importance of having an issue on which to claim credit during a future reelection campaign:

The argument for a major presidential address on the environment is this: we must not rest on our laurels. We must stay on the offensive by shifting the agenda to those issues that allow us to seize the constituencies of our opponents. On where to give such an address, furthermore, location played an important, electoral role . . . Recall that the President did poorly last November from Santa Barbara to the Canadian border, with the environment being the chief concern.

This broader electoral goal gave way to more specific efforts in targeting the agenda-setting stage with speeches. Indeed, the Bush administration was aware of the importance of being able to frame the debate early in the legislative process,⁹ a key feature of successful agenda-setting. By devoting numerous speeches to clean air early in the legislative process, President Bush also sent a strong signal to members of both parties in Congress—and the American people—of his commitment to significant clean air legislation.

Committee Stage

As the bill moved to committee, the focus of the president’s public speeches changed from setting the agenda and establishing a framework from which to claim credit for the legislation, to molding the bill’s content and its progress. Although the archives to date provide no clear evidence of the motivations behind Bush’s speeches at the committee stage, there are some implications that President Bush was concerned in private about the content and progress of committee deliberations. His advisors recommend that he posture himself through public rhetoric, not only to protect his reputation as the force behind this clean air bill, but also to help him push his version of the bill through committee. Concerning a substitute bill being advocated by Dingell, Nancy Maloley (Associate Director of the Office of Policy Development) suggests the following to Roger Porter (Assistant to the President for Economic and Domestic Policy):

Should the [Dingell] substitute be offered, the question turns on how we should posture ourselves in the face of criticism that our bill is being weakened. . . In the event the substitute includes those provisions on which we have a problem, we would have to separate ourselves from Dingell and Lent on the basis that those particular amendments clearly weaken the bill.¹⁰

This phrasing does not state unequivocally that the president chose to “separate” his administration from Dingell and Lent through a public relations strategy.

But given the timing of this advice and Bush's own public comments about congressional delay, it appears that the intent of the president's speeches at the committee stage was to remind legislators of his commitment to clean air legislation, to shape its substance, and to encourage legislators to vote the bill out of committee.¹¹ Right after both houses had addressed the bill in committee (November 7, 1989) the president said this in a press conference:

But I would like to take your question to challenge the United States Congress to go forward on the revisions to the Clean Air Act, on other initiatives that we have supported, instead of sitting back there and carping about it. And if they don't like our way, go ahead and try it, and then add to it in later years. But they sit there and argue back and forth with each other, and nothing happens.

Despite speaking consistently about the Clean Air Act during the fall of 1989 and into late winter 1990, the president did not speak much about it before the Christmas recess and while it was in committee. As the Senate voted shortly before the Christmas recess to report their Clean Air Bill out of the Committee for the Environment and Public Works, Bush waited until after the congressional recess to engage in a public relations strategy on clean air.

Roll Call Stage

Bush spent much of the early part of 1990 speaking about clean air as Congress readied to vote on final passage. He spoke several times just days before the Senate began floor deliberations on January 23, devoting 17 paragraphs to clean air legislation overall between January and May 1990. These data corroborate those presented in Table 1, which illustrate President Bush's tendency to speak predominately at the roll call stage. A representative example of roll call stage rhetoric includes these January 18, 1990 remarks at the Bush Administration Executive Forum:

Our commitment to the environment is crystal clear. We have sent Congress legislation to reduce acid rain. . . It is the first rewrite of the Clean Air Act in over 10 years. And I asked both Houses to preserve the careful balance in that bill—help clean up our air and preserve jobs. We've laid down a fair-minded compromise, and now let's break the stalemate. Let's protect our environment for decades to come. Let's get moving.

Although the House and Senate passed versions of the Clean Air Act in May 1990, final passage for the Clean Air Act of 1990 proceeded slowly as it bottled up in conference during the summer and early fall of 1990. The White House expressed both concern and optimism over the slow deliberations of the conference committee.¹² William Reilly's letter to Roger Porter illustrates how the administration was cognizant of influencing the conference committee to ensure low costs and political credit for the president's efforts: "As such, I fully support our initiative to propose a comprehensive 'Breakthrough' agreement. We will demonstrate,

once again, the environmental leadership of the President and be able to guide the substantive debate in the conference.”

As the bill worked further through conference committee, Porter recognizes in a memo to the president that “. . . conferees have exhibited little enthusiasm for a major administration role in the Conference,” and that it “may not produce an agreed upon bill.” Nevertheless, he advises that “This provides a great opportunity for you to correctly assign responsibility to the Congress for failing to pass your and the country’s major environmental initiative.” He then argues that “a presidential letter will position us well to sustain a veto if an unacceptable bill is produced by the conference. We don’t want to find ourselves in the position of having not clearly and publicly articulated what is your position on the key elements of this legislation.”¹³

Bush took Porter’s advice and wrote a letter to congressional leaders the next day. It reiterated Bush’s general principles for clean air legislation, which expressed a cost-benefit tenor, while promoting a pro-environment but efficient clean air bill. He also used this letter to resubmit his comprehensive proposal for clean air legislation to help “break the logjam that has once again appeared.” Playing to legislators’ knowledge of the legislative calendar, the president reminded them that if they did not act quickly and wrap up their efforts before the end of the legislative session, all their work would be for naught. Moreover, many Republican senators especially wanted to debate behind closed doors fearing that any objections they raised would pin them as anti-environmental, a poor label to carry during a reelection year. Clearly, this was a targeted effort to help move legislation out of conference committee.¹⁴

Bush coupled private action with public pressure on Congress to agree upon a clean air bill. Between August 1, 1990 and October 27, 1990 when the bill was finally cleared for the White House, President Bush used 11 speeches to target congressional inaction on the clean air bill.¹⁵ Many of these were campaign stops during a midterm election year, naturally, and were entirely consistent with Republican legislators’ concerns about not wanting to cast an anti-environmental vote in a reelection year. A representative example reveals Bush’s focus: “Now that Congress is back in session, we’ve got a lot of work to do. We’ve got to preserve this precious natural legacy of ours and pass the first package of comprehensive amendments to strengthen the Clean Air Act, the first in a dozen years. And the Congress ought to move now and give the Nation that legislation” (Bush 1991).

Overall, the evidence presented here is consistent with the quantitative data. Presidents have much incentive to sell their priorities through key and numerous speeches at the agenda-setting stage. Although Bush did target the committee stages with his public speeches, he also engaged in private maneuvering with legislators. However, the president reserved much of his public speeches for final passage. This included not only targeting Congress during floor deliberations in late winter and early spring of 1990, it also involved the president’s efforts to push the bill out of conference committee and toward final passage. Ultimately, just as speeches provide

information and leverage at all stages of the legislative process, when victory is the goal, going public is exceptionally focused on final passage where presidents maximize their impact on legislation.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to assess the president's speeches delivered at the several stages of the legislative process. It is the first to do so systematically and reveals some important conclusions consistent with our theory that presidents will use speeches at different stages of the legislative process based on the informational environment and what they hope to accomplish at each stage. It may be of little surprise that presidents target both the agenda-setting and roll call vote stages almost equally, and yet they do not expend much public effort on bills debated in committee. By targeting both the agenda-setting and roll call stages with their speeches, we conclude that presidents are not simply strategic actors who desire legislative victory, but they also wish that legislative victory to be shaped by their specific policy priorities framed at the agenda stage.

The theoretical contribution that speeches act as informational cues to legislators also produces a set of intriguing findings that adds to our understanding of one of the most examined variables in presidential-congressional relations. We show how presidents vary their use of public speeches in inverse relationship to their approval ratings. Because both variables act as informational cues to legislators, presidents speak more often to counter the negative signal that low approval ratings send to legislators. This logic also applies to other factors, such as the honeymoon period, and adds evidence to the perception that presidents go public when conditions are not otherwise favorable to presidential victory in Congress.

This article is also important not only in the context of recent research on the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, but also in how we conceive of going public as a governing strategy. The theoretical thrust of some early work on going public emphasizes its coercive element. That is, presidents go public to break gridlock and when bargaining may be an ineffective strategy (see Kernell 1997). Yet this article, along with Burnam's (2010) insights that private bargaining was a central feature of the Act's content and its passage, illustrates that going public and bargaining may best help presidential goal achievement when used in tandem. A future project should delve into this question more fully, perhaps by building upon Beckmann's (2010) theoretical frame to explain the optimum balance between public speeches and private bargaining for presidential success in Congress.

Of course, this is but a first glance at the complexities of presidential speechmaking and the often long, arduous, and anything but linear legislative process. As a first step, our dataset truncates most legislative activity at the key vote in the House of Representatives. Doing so excludes examination of congressional actions and presidential speechmaking after these selected votes. Naturally, future research should extend these data to uncover the complexities of presidential-congressional

relations not fully explored here, as the case study evidence indicates that there can be important public maneuvering even after key votes on final passage. Future research should also explore the extent to which presidential speeches targeted at the several stages help increase the president's success at those stages. Specifically, a broader sample that includes bills that were and were not voted out of committee can help shed light on the impact of presidential speeches and their impact on a bill successfully leaving committee. Furthermore, if presidents target the committee stage of lawmaking with their public speeches and are able to use them to increase the likelihood of a bill leaving a committee, this influence may not only increase their legislative success rate, but also shape the content of legislation to match more precisely their own policy preferences.

NOTES

1. Given the uncertainty surrounding the claim that presidents can lead public opinion with their public rhetoric (Edwards 2003) and only limited evidence that "going public" happens the way Kernell theorized (West 1988), we think that the president's primary task in speaking publicly—and in targeting various stages of the legislative process—is to communicate to Congress directly and to inform legislators of his commitment to a policy. This contrasts with theories espoused by Kernell (1997) and Canes-Wrone (2006), which rely on public pressure to influence legislation. Indeed, the results of this article coupled with those of another's (Burnam 2010) show how going public and private bargaining can be used in tandem to achieve the president's goals.
2. The White House also engages in private lobbying at both the agenda-setting and roll-call stages of the legislative process (Beckmann 2008). Although distinct, lobbying is highly correlated with going public efforts. In fact, Beckmann (2010, chapter 3) views President Bush's going public efforts on tax cut reform in 2001 as a form of White House lobbying.
3. Going public at the committee stage does not preclude "staying private" as well (see Covington 1987). Just as presidents have incentives to speak publicly at the committee stage, they undoubtedly use other more private means at this stage. We show this in our case study and contend that evidence of less attention at the committee stage may signal that presidents are indeed spending more time behind the scenes when a policy priority is in committee.
4. Although one might infer that all presidential initiatives are important initiatives, this is not correct according to the independent coding schemes for these variables. Of the 32 presidential initiatives in the sample, 11 are not considered to be important bills. The remaining important initiatives, roughly 75% of the sample, are congressional initiatives. Additional statistical evidence of the relatively weak relationship between presidential initiatives and important legislation is that phi (a correlation coefficient for dichotomous variables) is not statistically significant.
5. Our decisions to count a paragraph do not hinge on the president specifically calling on Congress to act. This is quite variable and appears to be a function of presidential style. Take two statements by two different presidents. President George H W Bush would explicitly call on Congress to act, as he did in a November 10, 1989, speech to the National Association of Realtors in Dallas, TX. "I've called on Congress to create at least 50 enterprise zones over the next 4 years to help create the jobs and incomes that are the real key to affordable housing. And I hope Congress gets the message; it is time that we gave the green light to our inner-city entrepreneurs." Although he did so at times, President Bill Clinton would call for action, but not call on Congress specifically to act. His style is clear in the following radio address on January 28, 1995, nonetheless: "I'm committed to making sure that the only goal of the welfare system is to help people get off of it, into a job where they can support themselves and their families. I believe we should give people the opportunity to move from dependence to independence, providing job training and child care if that's what they need for up to 2 years. . . . We should require work and responsibility, but we shouldn't cut people off just because they're poor or young or unmarried." These are both examples of presidential speeches that address a particular policy issue with the intent to influence the legislative process. One is more clear and

direct, while the other illustrates commitment for a particular policy position; but both signal to Congress the president's commitment, concern, and position about a policy. As such, both types of statements are included in our database.

6. The divide between the end of the committee stage and the roll call vote after a bill has been voted out of committee is very short. Indeed, only 22 bills in our sample had a larger than two-month window between being reported out of committee and the roll call vote. Interestingly enough, seven of these votes took place during the four years of the George H. W. Bush administration.
7. Implicitly, presidents anticipate their success at the roll-call stage, which may affect their level of public attention to a bill. This is consistent with Canes-Wrone (2006) who holds that budgetary success increases the likelihood of appeal. An alternative specification shows that a presidential victory on a roll call vote increases the tendency for presidents to speak before that vote. We are reticent to include this in the reported model, however, given the obvious concerns for endogeneity in that speeches theoretically also influence success and that the presidential victory occurs after—not before—the president's speechmaking. An ideal but unavailable measure for the president's perception of his likely victory on a roll-call vote would be a head count provided by the Office of Legislative Liaison prior to the roll call vote.
8. President Bush devoted 68 paragraphs to clean air legislation during the agenda-setting stage, between January and July 1989. These numbers counter Burnam's (2010, 317) observation that the "only public address the President made on clean air was during a 1988 campaign stop at the Detroit Metropark" and his implication that public speeches were not part of President Bush's legislative strategy on clean air. This note is not meant to undermine the importance of Burnam's analysis as it pertains to private bargaining to achieve legislation, but rather to illustrate that going public was also a significant part of President Bush's efforts to achieve passage of the Act.
9. "1. Thematics: The optimum way to sell the Clean Air Act is to place it in a larger context. The primary objective of such an approach is the creation of a benchmark statement on environmental issues that allows the Bush Administration to be measured on its own terms" (Box 21 Open P2/P5 Docs #6229 May 15, 1989 memo To Demerest/Winston From Greenberg RE: Clean Air Act Gameplan).
10. #11677, 9/15/89 [Memo for Porter; From Maloley; Status of clean air]
11. President Bush devoted 19 paragraphs to clean air legislation at the committee stage, between August and December 1989.
12. #575 (166087W), August 8, 1990, Memo Subject: Clean air act conference To: Roger Porter From William K. Reilly, "Clean air act is stalling in conference".
13. 576, 177638SS, 9/25/90 memo for the president, From: Roger Porter, Subject: clean air.
14. The benefits of staying private are noted at the end of a correspondence with Richard Guidry (2/3/90): "Pat Quinn—this will become partisan very quickly if we are not sensitive and quiet." #569—draft of clean air bill; correspondence with Richard Guidry (2/3/90).
15. In total, President Bush devoted 35 paragraphs to clean air legislation after it passed both houses of Congress and moved into conference committee deliberations.

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