Sunwater Institute

Interview with Craig Volden and Alan Wiseman

MATTHEW CHERVENAK: Craig and Alan, thank you so much for joining us.

CRAIG VOLDEN and ALAN WISEMAN: Thanks for having us.

CHERVENAK: Why don't we start off with some background on where you're coming from and how you got to where you are today. And, Craig, why don't we start with you?

VOLDEN: I don't know how far you want to go back, but I can start in high school. I was very interested in the rigor of science and engineering. I decided to go off to Caltech to study aeronautical engineering. At that point, I was doing all the classic things—an internship at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and so on. But, on the side, they made us study a bunch of stuff, including political science. And that's where I learned that political science could be treated like a science—we can develop hypotheses, we can test them—and it really drew me into that approach.

It caught my interest so much that after a couple of years, I actually transferred up to Stanford to study political science there, and then stayed on for my PhD, never looking back.

CHERVENAK: And since Stanford, where have you been and what are the various roles that you've had?

VOLDEN: After Stanford, I went off to teach for a year at the University of Chicago. Four years at Claremont Graduate University. Then a couple of years at the University of Michigan. Eight years at Ohio State. And now, about ten years at the University of Virginia. Kind of a nomadic life after [Stanford]. Really always pursuing the link between politics and public policy.

CHERVENAK: Alan, how about you?

WISEMAN: I have essentially absolutely no background in rocket science nor aspirations to pursue it. Similar to many other people who are interested in politics, I started off as the stereotypical pre-law geek. When I entered undergrad, I fully expected to go to law school. And then in my sophomore year, I engaged in a Washington, DC, internship where I was interning for the State of Illinois office. And when I was out there, on the one hand, I completely caught Potomac fever—I fell in love with Washington, DC, and the policymaking process—but at the same point, I also realized that I didn't really feel like I knew much about the actual consequences of the policies that were being implemented, so I felt like I really needed to learn a bit more about policy analysis and economics and the like.

I came back to the University of Illinois, which is where I went for undergrad, and finished up my bachelor's degrees there, and along the next year and a half to two years, it became apparent to me that pursuing a Ph.D. could be really constructive in terms of helping me reach

my goals in terms of really understanding the causes and consequences of policymaking in Washington, DC.

Straight from the University of Illinois, I went to the Stanford Graduate School of Business, where I ended up in the same Ph.D. program in political economics that Craig graduated from event though we missed each other by about six months.

CHERVENAK: Great. What have you done since Stanford?

WISEMAN: Since Stanford, my first academic position was at Ohio State, which is where Craig and I overlapped on the faculty. In between Stanford and Ohio State, I spent a year at the Federal Trade Commission serving as an advisor to a federal trade commissioner and working in the Bureau of Economics. I was at Ohio State for eight years, with the exception of a short stint when I was at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern teaching MBAs.

And then in 2010, my family and I moved down to Nashville, Tennessee, and we've now been at Vanderbilt University for about ten years.

CHERVENAK: What did you do at the trade commission? That's a little bit different than some of the others we've talked, so can you elaborate on what you would've done in there?

WISEMAN: Dating back to when I was in graduate school in 1999, I took off six months from graduate school to go out to the Federal Trade Commission. One of my faculty members at the Stanford Graduate School of Business Jeremy Bulow had taken over as the director of the Bureau of Economics, and he was interested in bringing in some new blood to both get engaged with projects and also provide some advanced graduate students with the opportunity to see the ways in which economic policies engaged with or [were] implemented by the government.

At the same point, actually dating back to my undergrad internship days, one of my mentors from my state of Illinois internship program was actually now the chief of staff to a federal trade commissioner.

So between the two of them, I ended up working out a position where I was both working in the Bureau of Economics and learning about the economics of electronic commerce and the anti-trust implications for electronic marketplaces on the internet. And at the same time, I was also serving as an ad hoc economic advisor to a commissioner on anti-trust policy, consumer protection cases, and the like.

And then in 2001-2002, I went back to spend a year there because this is right after President Bush was elected, and I thought it would be really interesting from a political scientist perspective to get insights as to way in which the commission worked when it shifted from being under a Democratic majority to control to Republican majority control. So, seeing that transition year was really fascinating.

And then from there, I went on to Ohio State, as I said. Being at the Commission really informed a lot of my research and interest in bureaucratic policy and regulation, which is another area

that I pursue in addition to the research that Craig and I engage with in studying lawmaking effectiveness in Congress.

CHERVENAK: Great. So why don't we talk broad strokes about what areas each of you is interested in. obviously, we're talking to you together because you're both involved on the legislative effectiveness work. Craig, if you don't mind, talk broadly speaking about what your research areas are. After that, we'll hear from Alan, and then we'll dive deeper into the legislative stuff.

VOLDEN: Sure. I'm always fascinated with that link between politics and public policy. What public policies are we able to achieve given that they have to be passed through some political process? And so that led me to focus on a variety of American institutions. I've been interested in American federalism, in separation of powers, institutions and so on.

Within American federalism, much of that politics to the policy-making process has focused on what we refer to as policy diffusion. If one state or locality adopts a particular policy, will it spread elsewhere? If it's a good idea, are those more likely to spread? And what are the pressures behind those sorts of policy changes?

At the national level, I've been interested in separation of powers issues. The president has some ideas—do they make their way through Congress? What's the role of the veto?

Likewise, if Congress is interested in getting something done but doesn't have the expertise, how much are they willing to delegate to the executive branch to make those decisions within the bureaucracy?

And no, of course, in terms of policy-making, who are those policy makers? Who are the lawmakers who actually get things done in Congress?

[Those questions have] really motivated our current projects.

CHERVENAK: In terms of your background, you mentioned that you started off more on the aerospace side. Have you been able to leverage any of that training in any of this political area? Obviously, there's a lot more rigor in terms of the quantitative methods compared to a lot of the history in political science, and maybe using more models and mathematics. Has that come up in your research? Or is that something that is a former life that doesn't inform much of what you do?

VOLDEN: The fact that I could marry those two areas is really what drove me to being the type of political scientist that I am now. Unless there's some theory somewhere that helps us develop those hypotheses that we can test, I'm not very satisfied with that. And that theory can be somewhat loose—it has to be grounded in who are the actors and what are they trying to accomplish—but in many cases, it's been game-theoretic models undergirding what we've been up to there. Everything from the spatial model of policymaking in Congress to some learning based models for policy diffusion and how much you go about all of the work that's necessary

to set up a new policy and learn from it or just free ride on the learning of others in that policy diffusion process.

And then, the empiric side—the data. We need to gather data that are appropriate to answer the questions that we're asking and to test those hypotheses. And that's becoming more and more plentiful as we have better information and data collection across the board in American politics.

CHERVENAK: Alan, can you overview some of the research you've been working on over the years, not just the legislative side but your broad interests?

WISEMAN: Actually, Craig and I have a lot of natural overlap, both in our methodological approach as well as the substance of our work. With respect to the overlap, methodologically speaking a lot of it probably follows organically from the fact that we went to the same graduate program. For good or for ill, we were subjected to the same core curriculum that aim to cultivate a certain skillset and a way to engage with both theoretical and empirical analyses to advance our inquiries.

In the broadest sense, my main interests in political science and public policy speak largely to the ways in which policy is created and represented in institutions. And the ways in which different political institutions could be leveraged either as constraints or, alternatively, facilitate opportunities for people to achieve their goals both within and beyond these institutions.

In thinking about it in those broad ways, I'm fascinated by the ways in which legislative bodies operate and the ways that individuals within legislative bodies can leverage the rules or perhaps create new rules to facilitate their goals.

Moving beyond legislative politics, I'm also quite interested—especially in the American context—about the ways in which bureaucracy in the broadest sense actually implements and creates the overwhelming majority of what we think of as law in the United States. Which raises some very interesting, and I believe, truthfully, quite understudied questions about the ways in which the bureaucracy is delegated authority, the potential constraints that are placed on these agencies upon this authority being delegated, and really the extent to which the legislative or in some cases the presidency itself can try to pull back or, alternatively, channel that bureaucratic authority once it's actually been let out of the box, so to speak.

Most of my research activities, probably over the last ten to fifteen years, have in fact been focused largely on legislative politics at the national level—Congress, for the most part—as well as thinking about the ways in which Congress and the presidency interact with the bureaucracy to facilitate policymaking.

CHERVENAK: Great. Let's move on to the congressional side of your work. Obviously, you guys have put together this great book on legislative effectiveness. And you've tried to quantify in some way how you can identify the right lawmakers in Congress and whether they can get their bills through Congress. And giving them scores.

Would you mind introducing the project as a whole? And then we can dive down into the details of it. Either one of you can take that.

VOLDEN: Why don't I start with a bit of the details and Alan can fill in. We've set up the Center for Effective Lawmaking, and that has the goal of all kinds of research on who the effective lawmakers are and why it matters that some people are more effective in Congress than others—what that means for power or what that means for public policy creation.

And a lot of that work is based on what we had done previously—the book that you had mentioned as well as the legislative scores that are undergird it. I'll go into how we came up with our scores and then maybe Alan can talk about some of the research findings out of them.

Our legislative effectiveness scores were based on a conversation that Alan and I had when we were both back at Ohio State, where we were interested in knowing a little bit more about who these members of Congress were. At that point in time, if people were talking either in the political science community or the media about individual lawmakers, they were largely just characterizing them on one or two dimensions. One being, Are you a Democrat or a Republican? And the second, just how liberal or conservative are members?

And that was crucial because Congress was becoming more polarized and we knew that there were pretty major effects there. But Alan and I were looking at individual bills and members and saying, some of the most liberal members, some of the most conservative members, some moderates are the ones who are actually always in the news and others are the ones who are always getting things done. How much can we imagine looking at who actually gets things done in Congress. Who are the effective lawmakers? Is there a way to characterize that systematically? Both of us are guided by theory and data.

And so, we worked for a couple of years on thinking through that problem and eventually came up with our legislative effectiveness scores. These scores combine fifteen different metrics based on the bills that members of Congress sponsor and how far they move through the lawmaking process.

So, we look at, How many bills did a member sponsor? And, in our early days, we were looking at sponsorship, co-sponsorships, amendments, all kinds of things. But we found that ultimately looking at them as the primary sponsor was tapping into the dimension we were looking at.

And then we wanted to follow these bills throughout the lawmaking process. To the extent that there was anything equivalent to our scores before, it had just been these hit rates of what percent of your bills become law. And we found that really unsatisfying. You put forward one proposal and it becomes a law, suddenly you're a top performer. Whereas somebody who works on a lot of issues and is pretty successful at many of them might get a lower score.

We wanted to account for a portfolio size—how many bills do you sponsor—and not just did they become law, because you can pick up a lot about who's effective and where they're effective by tracing different stages of the lawmaking process.

So we looked at five stages from bill introduction to our second stage being action in committee—did the bills get hearings or markups or subcommittee votes—to action beyond committee as our third step—did they reach the floor of the House or the floor of the Senate—to passing their home chamber as our fourth step and to becoming law as our fifth step.

And we were giving people more and more credit for things that are more and more rare. Lots of people introduce bills—there are thousands in any two-year Congress—many fewer are given action in committee, many fewer pass in their home chamber, many fewer becoming law.

And then, of course, we know that bills are different from one another, and so we had to find a way to characterize that. We didn't want to have to go through scoring every bill. We didn't know exactly how to do that nor objectively how to do that, but we also didn't want to leave it that every bill was ranked the same.

And so, we came up with three broad categories. The lowest one, where people get very little credit, is the commemoratives—your naming of post offices and so on. Many bills are substantive—they're not just namings; they're not just minting coins—they're dealing with substantive issues, and that's our middle category.

But then we came up with our top category for the most important laws—what we call the substantive and significant bills. And those are the ones that are tackling the major issues of the day, getting lots of media attention. We characterize that objectively by, are they mentioned by Congressional Quarterly, which is kind of an inside baseball publication.

And so that gives us these five stages of the lawmaking process and three levels of bill significance which we combine into a weighted metric—a legislative effectiveness score—that we normalize to a value of 1 in each Congress. So, we can say 1 is the average, 0 if you don't introduce anything, and number scores range up into the 20s, and so on, for the people who are really effective.

And we've been able to score every member of the House and every member of the Senate back to the early 1970s and up through today.

WISEMAN: And then once we had that data at our disposal, obviously, the book as you made reference to, a big part of it was trying to present the data and make sure it's clear that it had some degree of face validity. That it was essentially measuring what we thought it was measuring.

And then present a series of questions regarding, essentially, what contributes to or detracts [from] the effective lawmaking of members of the US House from 1973 to 2008. We presented a variety of findings in the book regarding which types of members based on their background or personal characteristics are more or less likely to be successful.

And then based on those findings in that book, we set forth what we believe is the foundation for the research agenda that is going to take us the next ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years in the

Center for Effective Lawmaking in which our research activities in the broadest sense—as well as our outreach activities—are organized around three broad themes that are part of what we refer to as the Building a Better Congress Project.

One theme that we refer to is Identification. We're trying to understand what it is about individuals' backgrounds—their personalities or their previous occupations; in the broadest sense, things they did prior to becoming members of Congress—that might be correlated with their success once they get to Congress. Can we identify those traits?

The second broad theme we refer to is Cultivation—conditional on being elected, what strategies or skills or tactics can an individual cultivate—or perhaps, members of the minority or majority party help them cultivate—to either contribute to or perhaps detract from their effective lawmaking in Congress.

And the third broad theme that we're focused on studying is what we refer to as Accountability. To what degree are members of the mass public or the electorate broadly considered interested in the entire concept of what we refer to as legislative effectiveness? If they're informed about the lawmaking effectiveness of their incumbent members, are they interested in that? Do they care? Do they base their voting decision on that?

Moving beyond the electorate, how about interest groups? Or more focused interests. Do they think about an individual's lawmaking effectiveness when they engage with them in Congress? Or, alternatively, if people are relatively ineffective in certain policy areas, are they less likely to attract support from external constituencies?

These broad themes—identification, cultivation, and accountability—really lay out the road map for a variety of research questions that we're engaging in now building on research of the last ten years. Looking at some of the broad ways that we've been engaging with these questions, we like to think we've come up with a pretty strong collection of empirical regularities that can help to provide guidance to both interested members of the public as well as members of Congress themselves about what strategies they could employ, or alternatively, what factors contribute to or perhaps detract from lawmaking effectiveness in Congress.

For example, in the current political environment, there's arguments as to whether or not there's any virtue in engaging in bipartisanship. And one of the points that emerges from a more recent study that Craig and I, as well as Laurel Harbridge-Yong at Northwestern University, have demonstrated is that in both the House and the Senate—even within these incredibly contentious political times—it's still the case that those members of the House and Senate who engage in meaningful bipartisan actions as measured by their ability to generate cosponsors or attract cosponsors from members of the other party are notably more effective and more successful at advancing their bills than those who essentially go it alone or reach out primarily to members of their own party to try to facilitate their success.

If you think about a newly elected member of the House and Senate, one of the first things they need to do is to hire a staff. We might want to ask ourselves, well, do staffing choices really influence or are they correlated with one's lawmaking effectiveness. And one of the points that Craig and I have found with our coauthors is that it's unambiguously the case that members of Congress, especially newly elected members of Congress, should be trying to seek out and acquire and hire those individuals who have some meaningful Hill experience rather than perhaps hiring campaign loyalists or campaign staffers with relatively limited Hill experience.

We find among newly elected members of the House, those who are able to attract and hire reasonably experienced members of Hill staff are notably more effective than those similarly situated freshman members of the House who have very little staff experience.

We could go down the list and think about broad questions about institutional reform. One of the questions that Craig and I engaged in our earlier work was to try to assess the consequences of the term limits on committee chairs what were imposed in the 104th Congress under the Republicans back in 1995. And one of the points we were able to demonstrate in a very robust manner was that those members of Congress who continued to serve in chair positions following the imposition of chair term limits were noticeable less effective than those who had served in Congress prior to term limits on chairs being implemented.

Which raises some very important and broad questions—and guidance, we think—about the ways in which some of the institutional reforms that Congress has experimented with over the past twenty and thirty years has contributed to, or in this case, we'd argue has detracted from, the acquisition of expertise, internal knowledge, and policy knowledge that could facilitate legislative success.

And, Craig, I'm sure you could point to other—

VOLDEN: Yeah, so just a couple of things that I'd point out in terms of what the Center allows us to do. One is just that we have this Faculty Affiliates Program where we have a dozen or more faculty affiliated with us from across the country. I think we're up to twenty-two at this point, Alan? And they're able to engage with us on a variety of ideas and couple with one another in their coauthorship activities. It really builds up this community of scholars who are interested in similar questions.

That keeps us always thinking and always getting feedback from one another, and so that's been fantastic in terms of the scholarly community. But then the second big thing is engaging with the policy process. Engaging with those lawmakers. Having the opportunity to talk to new lawmakers about what they're struggling with. Or the members or staff of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress—what sort of reforms are they interested in?

And by engaging on those fronts, we can present our work, but simultaneously we hear their questions of, Oh, I'd love to know more on these issues. How much would this reform help?

What should we think about staff benefits? What should we think about bipartisanship? And so on. And that feeds new research ideas back and forth.

As much as we have the broad outlines of what we're currently working on, the number of new ideas that are coming to us by engaged faculty around the country as well as members of Congress, their staff, and others, has just been tremendous with more ideas than we have time to complete them by a long, long margin.

CHERVENAK: I think it's great that you've taken this data-driven approach and brought a systematic view to it that a lot of others can leverage. And can see a methodology to try to improve things with evidence backing it up rather than a straight historical view or a story-based view. The data can tell you, for instance, whether the term limits had an impact or not and you can actually quantify that. It's much more powerful, and I think that's one of the great contributions of your work.

I think another area that you didn't mention but I'd like to ask about is the issue-specific findings that you had. Because obviously different issue areas may be harder or easier to get bills passed. And specialization might lead to some people that are very effective at passing bills in one particular area but obviously not in another.

I'd like to hear more about your findings related to that. It's not just a matter of, Is the lawmaker good at passing laws? It's, Are they good at getting laws passed in "X" field, right? And I think that's an important specialization, particularly as it relates to committees, that is worth understanding a little bit more in detail.

VOLDEN: I can start on that one as well. A little bit in the book, but much more recently, we've been exploring twenty different issue areas on which members can be effective. And essentially, as far as our methodology, we're able to do just exactly the same things as we did on our overall legislative effectiveness score, but now instead of looking at every bill, we'll look first at all of the bills dealing with health and come up with a health score. All of the bills dealing with education. And so on. And come up with scores along those lines.

We're going to make all of those scores widely available on our website just like we do with all of our data. As you were mentioning, Matthew, having that data available—both to the public (you can click on our maps and find out who the effective lawmakers are) but also to the research community as we have all of the data for download there—is really helping build up this overall enterprise.

But on the issue-specific scores, one thing that we did as an initial examination is just say, Who are the members who are really general? That are sponsoring one bill in each of the twenty different issue areas. That are just getting their feet wet a little everywhere. Probably because they're having some constituents who care about these different issues. Or they're being lobbied on these fronts.

Versus those who are really specialists. Those who dive in and half of their bills are in health or in science and technology issues or whatever area. And how effective are they along those lines?

In a recent working paper, we explored that, and we found there's something of a nonlinear relationship there that being an extreme generalist or an extreme policy specialist—neither of those is the most optimal. The most optimal is you dedicated about half of your agenda to a single issue, but then you introduce in a few other areas as well.

And that presents some opportunities. You could be a specialist in transportation but it's not time to deal with transportation issues. Suddenly you're pretty ineffective. But if you diversify a little bit more that helps with your effectiveness.

But then we tracked, ok, well, just how consolidated or specialized are people's agendas. And we found that eighty to ninety—in the Senate recently 95 percent of senators—are less specialized than the optimum. And so almost everybody—we won't say everybody in Congress—but almost everybody in Congress would benefit, if they want to be effective lawmakers, from tailoring their agendas.

Now we understand there are pressures to cater to those interest groups or constituents or show that you're active in an area. But those pressures do push people away from effective lawmaking, away from specialization and gaining that expertise.

CHERVENAK: That makes a lot of sense. If we could talk a little bit about the first step in the chain, which is introducing bills. Can you talk about the distribution of lawmakers in terms of how many bills they really introduce? How many are more of the commemorative versus the substantive? Versus the significant? Whether they're freshman versus if they're in for fifteen years.

Did any of your findings in analyzing that first step—the bill introduction—surprise you or give some interesting patterns that are worth noting?

WISEMAN: That's a really good question, Matthew. Because once we actually have the data, we're just in a position to engage with primary research to get a sense of what does the world look like in Congress at any given point in time. And has it changed across eras?

Craig, correct me if I'm wrong in terms of actual raw percentages, but in any given Congress, at least given the way we code up the data, I believe it's the case that we have approximately 3 percent of the data is what we denote as a commemorative bill, and roughly about 3 percent of the data is what we denote as substantive or significant or the most important of salient pieces of legislation. Is that roughly correct in most congresses?

VOLDEN: I say about 5 percent because certainly in the earlier years of our data it was as high as 10 percent in many cases. So, that substantive middle category is eighty to ninety percent and then the tops and bottoms are fewer.

WISEMAN: And then in general, some things happen exactly the way you'd probably expect they would be occurring. And by that, I mean more senior members of the chamber introduce more legislation than the more junior members of the chamber, relatively speaking. Members of the majority party tend to produce more bills on average than members in the minority. But not necessarily, not a stark difference in many Congresses.

When we dive into the data, one thing that did emerge in our analysis within our book, as well as within some of our other published work, that was quite interesting to us was a notable gender difference that emerged with respect to members of the majority and the minority party. And by that, I mean women in the minority party tend to introduce notably more legislation than their male counterparts in the minority party. Whereas when they're in the majority party, there are differences between men and women in terms of their introductions, but the difference isn't nearly as stark.

As we dove into the data—and this served as the foundation for some further analysis that we engaged in that was published in a paper with Dana Wittmer Wolfe back in 2013 in the American Journal of Political Science, in which we explored the relative lawmaking effectiveness of male versus female members of Congress—what we found is that female members of Congress in the minority party are notably more successful at advancing their legislative agendas than men in the minority party. But in the majority party, the differences between men and women are—especially in more recent eras—are relatively de minimus.

And what we found, interestingly enough, especially if we looked at the switch in power between majority to minority party—so when a party is in the majority that then goes to the minority in the next Congress and vice versa—we found that on average it's quite common that men who were in the majority party who've switched to the minority party, they start to engage in lawmaking in a very different way. They go from introducing a law to legislation when they're in the majority party and trying to push their bills through the process to not engaging in the lawmaking process nearly as much when they're in the minority. They stop introducing bills—they'll still introduce, but not nearly as much—actually in the starkest examples, we can find cases in which some people who were quite prolific when they're in the majority party, as soon as they went to the minority, they stopped introducing almost any legislation.

In contrast to what we see in many cases among men in Congress, women in Congress—regardless of whether or not they're in the majority or minority party—they consistently try to advance their legislative portfolios. Even when they've moved into the minority party, they consistently try to introduce these bills and try to advance them through the committee system.

In tandem—women consistently trying to advance their legislation regardless of whether or not their party is in the majority versus the minority and men clearly engaging in differential tactics depending on whether or not they're in the majority or minority party—contribute to this quite

robust finding that we've observed in both the House as well as the Senate across eras that minority party women are notably more effective lawmakers than minority party men.

CHERVENAK: That's interesting. What about in terms of the individual lawmaker? Are they all pretty similar in that typically a congressman will have a number of these commemoratives, a number of these substantive, and then one or two of the substantials? Or is it that a lot of lawmakers are just putting a bunch of commemoratives in and that's their focus and then others are focused on substantive? Or is it quite a normal distribution across all the different lawmakers?

VOLDEN: It's all over the board, which is really interesting to see. Because the numbers are small on the top end and the bottom end—on the commemoratives and on the substantive and significant—to fully characterize, I guess we haven't spent that much time trying to characterize who are the commemorative folks. But on the substantive and significant bills, there is a bias in media reporting that they're not going to report on a bill that's going to immediately die in committee. They are going to report on the ones that are moving farther through the process, and we know that bills that move farther through the process tend to be from committee chairs and from members of the majority party. And so, there is quite a bit of difference there in substantive and significant bills between the majority and the minority party.

But I love this idea of diving into those different stages of the lawmaking process and wanted to build on Alan's point on two different fronts. One is with regard to the majority and the minority party [there is] not a huge gap. Certainly majority party members introduce more bills than minority party members, but once we get to stage two—are they getting hearings, are they getting it through committee, and so on—that's where the majority party factor is coming in so strongly. Five-to-one or ten-to-one as far as the majority party dominating the minority party in which bills move forward at the committee stage.

An interesting finding we had is [that] if you make it over that high hurdle and you're in the minority party and you get something to floor of the House or the floor of the Senate, it's actually more likely to pass than bills that are sponsored by members of the majority party on the floor, which we found really intriguing.

And then the second point I wanted to raise was in regard to ideology. We had mentioned that there are all of these scores out there in terms of how ideologically conservative or liberal various members are, and we had thought there might be patterns there in our legislative effectiveness scores. And there are quite a few, but one that I want to mention is, up front, people who are on the extremes of the spectrum—the really conservative members and the really liberal members—they introduce more bills. But they're not as successful with them. The moderates when they come up with ideas can kind of naturally build up a coalition.

Because we track each of those stages, and we give a lot of credit for each of the stages—more so for the rarer stages—we find that on average moderates and extremists are about equal in

accomplishing their goals, or in our scores, because the extremists are raising more bills and the moderates are passing more laws. And that balances out in our overall metric.

Something you wouldn't know if you didn't crack it open to these different stages, as you're pointing out.

CHERVENAK: A big challenge, I'm sure, related to understanding that is whether the bill itself has broad support or [if] it's a narrower interest that might be more extreme or only interesting to a narrow constituency. Of course, it's hard to score every bill along those lines. Even the sponsors won't probably know that answer very clearly.

But it does bring up the question, though—and the fundamental question, of course, of your research—is, If I'm a lawmaker, one way to get my ideas or my interests into law is through a bill that I sponsor. Right? Another way is, I could tell the head of my committee, hey, I want this in the bill, and he could put it in his bill.

You could have a very indirect way of getting your interests in the bill. You could amend a bill. There are lots of other ways to contribute your ideas into what eventually becomes law. The easiest one to trace is the bills-to-law process, which is what you've got. That's where you have the data.

But I wonder, have you tried to investigate these other areas of—. Because some lawmakers would say, hey, I don't get my bills in, but there's a lot of my ideas in what eventually becomes law. I just haven't used that channel.

Have you looked at those other ways of contributing and have you tried to quantify them at all?

WISEMAN: That's a great question, Matthew. And I'll take the first pass and Craig will hopefully jump in. That's a great question, and truthfully that's an issue that we've wrestled with from day one in this project because, as you said, we have very good data on what people introduce and where it goes in the process, but that being said, there's lots of things that might get introduced that might find chunks of themselves in other legislative vehicles. And the way in which we engage in our current analysis, we can't account for the extent to which different bills or legislative vehicles for other things that were introduced at different stages. Or, even in more extreme cases, as you say, people pushing for "I brought ideas" that then find their way into legislative language even though no one ever offered them.

This is something that we've been wrestling with. We think about it quite earnestly. And we're currently working with a team of scholars to come up with what we hope will be what we refer to as LES 2.0, so to speak. And that would be a legislative effectiveness score that actually accounts for the extent to which the bills that someone sponsors are their own—and by that I mean in terms of actual text—or alternatively, they're borrowing portions or chunks of text from other legislative vehicles that other people have introduced to them [in that] Congress.

As a result, people will get portions of credit for having bills go further and further through different stages of the legislative process if those bills actually have portions of their own legislative language they introduced in other vehicles.

So that's one way that we'll hopefully be able to account for the extent to which people—for example, the minority party might introduce bills and they might have very little hope of getting the bill as its own stand-alone legislative vehicle making its way all through the legislative process into law, but they might be fortunate enough to have some portion of that bill find its way into a different legislative vehicle [and] it does advance further. Perhaps on the part of a majority party sponsor.

And hopefully the metric that we devise would allow us to provide those initial sponsors some degree of credit towards the legislative effectiveness score in a way that we can't currently do.

The broader issues, however, that you allude to—that being the situation in which people literally have ideas and they're articulating those ideas to individuals who then write bills, but the individuals who write bills are the people whose bills are going forward. It's not the case that the people who had the idea ever even wrote anything. At the moment we haven't really devised or haven't really thought about a systematic way to codify that type of process.

But it goes without saying that definitely happens. We know that's important, and this is once again another great thing about working with such a substantial and intellectually diverse team of research affiliates at these different universities. Many people are interested in precisely these types of questions and brainstorming a bit as to how we can go about really cracking open the lawmaking process. Especially at the committee stage, which we know lots of these types of things occur even though it's very difficult as an analyst—even if we know a lot about the nuts and bolts of Congress—it's difficult for us as an analyst to get access to this data in a consistent way that would allow us to code it in such a way to facilitate measurements.

VOLDEN: The things I'd contribute there are, you know, our first set of scores really was getting the conversation going about legislative effectiveness, and we were able to find a lot of things. We'll be curious when we come up with this second set of scores. Are they highly correlated with what we have already? It's the same people getting work done behind the scenes. Or are they taking us in different directions?

Just the same way that it was really valuable for us to dive into the different stages of our first set of scores, we'll be very curious on new language added to bills—how much of that can we track down to other bills from other members? Or to amendments? And so on. And how much of that is really black-boxed? And if it is something that we've never seen before sponsored in other language or other bills, what can we say about that? Is that mostly added in the committee process? If so, we have to dedicate a lot of effort to getting transparency in committee.

Is it mostly back and forth between the House and Senate? Well, then we better start focusing our efforts there. And just finding out where are the questions that we don't know the answers to.

The other thing that I'd say on this front is we're starting a project on bill ideas that come from the president or from the executive branch. When they have ideas that they want advanced through Congress, are they going to the most effective lawmakers to promote their interests? And since there's this natural coalition potentially [with] the president backing these changes, are those bills more likely to move through the lawmaking process? Is it a combination of work with chairs, work with effective lawmakers, and use the force of the executive branch to promote these ideas that really allows that separation of powers to work in the lawmaking process in some interesting ways.

CHERVENAK: I'm curious since you've spent so much time thinking on this subject of the bills and who introduces them. I think—and I'm not familiar with the literature and maybe you can enlighten us—but there's probably different theories about when the interest is high enough that a bill is created. And what are the triggers for that—the issue is small enough then people don't bother with a bill—and eventually it gets big enough that a bill is created by someone. And so, in society or in a small group, it's reached this threshold.

And you could probably make an argument that there should be ten times as many bills that are introduced because there's a lot of things that can be changed or improved in the federal government. On the other side, you could make an argument that such a small percentage are approved or make it through the process that there's a lot of junk in there. And that maybe a lot of the lawmakers don't even believe in these ideas that they're putting in there. They're just putting it in there for a constituency or optics.

What is your thought on that? Would you like to see a lot more bills? A lot more substantive bills in Congress? Or do you think that there should be fewer bills? Or is that an area that needs further research?

VOLDEN: My take on it is throwing a bill in the hopper is [a] pretty low bar. And although there are ideas that don't make it [to] that stage—we're seeing seven to ten thousand bills in a two-year Congress in the House and about that same number in the Senate—I don't think there are ideas that the public cares a lot about that are neglected along those lines.

Where we're interested in is the next stages there. So, somebody starts a bill idea. It doesn't get traction. What do they do? In some cases, they could just abandon it. They could just put it up in the next Congress. But in other cases, we see this building up of support over time. Bills are introduced again in the next Congress. This time with twice as many cosponsors. Bills that get a hearing in one Congress are more likely to make it to the floor in the next Congress. Those that pass the House in one Congress are more likely to—. You know, so you describe this as building more and more support, and I guess I wasn't seeing that so much at the—. You need a lot of support to get the bill in, in the first place.

I think it's moving forward from those seven to ten thousand to the four percent that pass Congress. I think that's where at least I'm interested in a lot of the action moving forward.

WISEMAN: I would agree with Craig's perspective on this. Matthew, when you were asking, Do we have enough bills? Or not enough? Or maybe there's things that are not really getting going anywhere.

From my perspective, I'm personally agnostic about this because that speaks to broader questions of representation, I think. And from my perspective, similar to what Craig was saying, conditional on having a good staff, putting together a bill—to represent the interests of stakeholders that are presented [to] the cases to you—isn't really the most laborious part of the process in comparison to what happens afterwards.

So, the extent to which people would want members of Congress in the House and the Senate to be representing stakeholders in the broadest sense, I think we'd hope that they'd be introducing legislation in response to people pressing their needs to them. But then what happens next—whether or not they're successful because of the effort they exert or alternatively the issue they're engaging with or their institutional position—these are precisely the types of questions that we're interested in studying and trying to learn more about. Especially for people that are particularly interested—either members of Congress themselves or alternatively their stakeholders—people who are particularly interested in trying to understand what are the keys to legislative effectiveness.

CHERVENAK: I wonder, too, whether that might vary quite a bit from issue area to issue area. And whether constituencies, of course, have a stronger voice with the representative than others. And so that would be an interesting breakdown.

VOLDEN: Right. Now that we have those issue area scores, we're engaging in what we call our portfolios project. How much is one's portfolio reflective of what we know about their district characteristics? Reflective of what they have already a background or expertise on from their prior jobs? Or reflective of lobbyists and those who are giving them campaign funds? We'll be able to separate a lot of those out now that we're looking at those specific issues.

CHERVENAK: Right. Before we move to some more general questions that I've got, maybe we can talk briefly about the steps after the bill is introduced. In committee. And then floor. And then all the way through both chambers to the president. My guess is, and correct me if I'm wrong, but once—. The lawmaker can control the bill's introduction. Each step after that, they have less and less control. They become less of a lawmaker than they become—or maybe that is the definition of a lawmaker—and they become more of a project manager or they become more of a salesman. And [those are] quite different skill sets. In the same way as an inventor might be a great inventor but they may not be a very good marketer. And so, I think there are a lot of similarities there.

You mentioned the committee is a key point, and whether if you're in the minority, getting through the committee is the biggest death area for your bill. But can you talk more about the next steps and what are the key factors that you've seen that allow lawmakers to either get their bills advanced or not?

VOLDEN: It really depends on a lot of things. One of the reasons why we wanted to go through these different stages is the most effective lawmakers have to come up with good ideas and have to be able to promote them and navigate them and find ways through the House, through the Senate, and so on. And that's a rare commodity that you're good at all of those stages. And so, yes, definitely you have to rely on others.

One thing that we had found in our work on bipartisanship, for example—attracting a lot of bipartisan cosponsors is something that seems to help bills. But those people who are really bipartisan aren't introducing any more or less bills. But the fact that they're reaching out and building those coalitions helps them immensely at later stages. Helps them immensely in getting those bills through committees and getting them success on the floor of the House, on the floor of the Senate.

If we were to break down these different stages in our data analysis and see, well, how well can explain them by all of these factors that we've been talking about, the one that we are least able to explain is from that stage of something passing your home chamber to it going out and becoming law. In other words, building bicameral coalitions. I think there might be something there. We just haven't been able to track it down yet.

And so, thinking through, you spend so much time and effort coming up with an idea and building the coalitions in your home chamber, and then it goes over to the other chamber, and who knows what's going to happen over there. Some members are really good at, ok, I'm the House member, and I'm going to have good relations with my senators and let's make sure that we coordinate on what our efforts. Some much less so.

But I think that's an area very ripe for future research.

CHERVENAK: I would think that would have a nice tie—probably by state or by caucus or by whether that member is close to the leadership or not since the leadership in theory should be providing a lot of that project management role to move it through—.

VOLDEN: Right. I mean this is—. You had mentioned the joys of doing quantitative work. This is one where I think the qualitative work comes and complements it very well. From my perspective, it's that combination of, well, let's talk to people and find out what's going on there.

We just did an interview up on our website with Don Young of Alaska, and he was telling us a couple of things that he does to make sure his bills don't die when they move to the Senate. One is he tries not to be partisan at all. So, he'll talk about district interests and so on, but not making it a Republican bill such that it would die in the other chamber if that's held by

Democrats. And the second is just tightly working with the senators, and he felt that he could do that in Alaska since he's [like] the senator—the person being the only representative there—whereas somebody who's from a really split delegation, Pennsylvania or something, it's tough to coordinate with your senators and get a single voice there.

CHERVENAK: Great. Well, I'm going to move on to some general questions if you're ready for those. Not specific to your research but relevant to Congress. My first one, and I'll ask these of each one of you, What do you think congressional representation should mean? Craig, why don't we start with you.

VOLDEN: I see representation as being really multi-faceted. One thing that people have studied in the past is if your constituency is really liberal, do you vote in a really liberal manner? Or if they're caring immensely about ethanol policy, do you support them on those sorts of issues?

And without a doubt, that's representation. But the thing that I'm focused on, and that the Center is focused on, is representation means not just voting when an issue comes up but shaping that agenda. And so, working effectively to put ideas out there on behalf of one's constituency. I would say a poorer representative is someone who doesn't work on these issues or doesn't move their bills though the process.

And, likewise, somebody who moves bills through the process that has nothing to do with the American public on the whole, or with their constituents in particular, are most interested in.

CHERVENAK: If I can dig a little bit deeper on that, you mentioned on the one side you talked about beliefs of the district and then later on you talked about the interests of the district. Are you more of a beliefs—should the representative reflect the beliefs of their district as they stand at any given time—or that they should be thinking about the long-term interests of that district and making judgments based on what they think those long-term interests should be?

VOLDEN: I tend to be a big, big fan of expertise, and ideally, then, members of Congress would get to know that policy area. Get to know what's best for their district and behave in that manner in a way that constituents just don't have the time to figure that out. Now members of Congress don't have the time to figure it out as well in a variety of issues and so how can they best move forward is really the crux of some of these questions before Congress today.

CHERVENAK: So, it sounds like you believe in expertise and you believe in the representative as making his own judgments on the interests of the district.

VOLDEN: I would like to hope that we would get to a position where they would be able to do that. That's right.

CHERVENAK: Great. Alan, same question to you.

WISEMAN: I have a lot of overlap with Craig's perspectives, especially this latter one. Because truthfully, from my perspective, I've always thought the only distinction between what you're identifying as beliefs and interests is just a time horizon. A time horizon of information in the

sense that if people were generally well-informed about the consequences of their choices, then what they believe would actually be what we think of as their quote-unquote best interests.

As a result, if it's the case that members of Congress—the House and Senate—are just generically better informed about the consequences of their choices and how it's going to relate to the districts, my view on this is them taking or making choices that are consistent with their expertise, by definition they're making choices that are consistent with the beliefs and interests of their district even though it might not be apparent at that point in time. But if their constituents actually were in the same position as the representative who are hopefully better informed than them, they'd be advocating for those same courses of action.

Likewise, similar to Craig, I think representation is multi-faceted. I would agree with everything that Craig said, but I'd also like to push it even one degree further to say that I'm also cognizant to the fact that I don't think it's the case that all constituents necessarily want their representative or senators to engage in lawmaking in the way we described it. I don't think either of us would ever suggest that members of Congress who aren't quote-unquote effective lawmakers on our metric are poor representatives of their constituencies.

I think people get elected to Congress for many different reasons, including just having a presence, a seat at the table, and being able to articulate their voices in such a way to ensure that their views are being heard and are ultimately incorporated into legislation or at least into the discussion in some way. I think that's particularly important for historically underrepresented groups.

What I would say, which is quite important, is I would hope that members of Congress, both of the House and of the Senate, when they're presenting themselves to voters, they're very transparent about the things they're planning on doing when they're in Congress, such that when people are voting for them, they're aware of what their expectations are or should be. And then it's the case that upon being elected, people are true to the way in which they said they were going to be engaging in certain types of activities in Congress.

From my perspective, if they're doing that, then really regardless of their day-to-day activities, they're serving the representational needs of their constituencies.

CHERVENAK: Great. Next one is, How would your ideal Congress allocate its time?

VOLDEN: Do you want to lead on that one, Alan?

WISEMAN: From my perspective, I think I'd pick it up again from where Craig started the discussion, and that's saying that I put a pretty high premium on the value of expertise and information. I think it'd be incredibly constructive for members of Congress, either in terms of day-to-day activities or alternatively devoting resources towards other institutions that could facilitate the creation of expertise. Such that people are as well-informed as possible about the

relevant needs of their constituencies at the times in which they're formulating policy. Or likewise at the times they vote for policies.

I think, in general, institutional reforms that could contribute to the cultivation of expertise or information in the broadest sense are things I think would be very helpful for Congress.

CHERVENAK: If I had to push a little further on percentage time allocated to what kind of activity—obviously, lawmaking is one that you've studied the most—but congressman and senators do a lot of work that's constituent-service related, that's oversight related, it's fundraising related—. If I could ask you a different way, what percentage of their time should they spend on lawmaking versus some of the other aspects I just mentioned?

WISEMAN: Craig, I'll turn that to you, my friend.

VOLDEN: My answer on this whole thing is a little different. Some members are going to be very interested in lawmaking. Some are very interested in oversight. And so on. For me, the key word is balance.

I'm fortunate to be in a position where my job has me teaching in areas that I do research in and engaging with members of Congress or the media in areas I do research on. And so, I feel like I have that level of balance where everything is coming together on the same issues that I'm very interested in.

Members of Congress should find that balance, and they have to find it for themselves. If you're really interested in lawmaking, it doesn't mean you spend a hundred percent of your time on lawmaking. It means when you're doing oversight, do oversight with an eye towards, well, how is that going to help us in formulating our legislation. When you're doing constituency service, what do my constituents—what are they interested in, and how can I formulate a better law based on that? When you're engaged in fundraising, it's not just an ask for money, it's at the same time trying to figure out, What are the goals of these folks that I'm talking to? Where are our laws possibly improved along those lines?

The really effective lawmakers do this all the time. They just see this overlap. They introduce bills that are a combination of their own expertise, their committee assignments, and their district characteristics. They just find that balance.

And I'd be hopeful that despite the fact that members of Congress are going to be very different than what they're trying to achieve, that with those goals, they can find that balance for themselves.

CHERVENAK: Sounds like your answer is for each lawmaker—or each representative—it would be a different percentage allocated to lawmaking versus oversight versus something else.

VOLDEN: Probably so.

CHERVENAK: Alright. Next question is, How should debate, deliberation, or dialogue occur or be structured in Congress? So, we didn't talk much about this as part of your work, but obviously Congress is—at least it was intended to be a place—where ideas weren't just introduced, they were discussed. And that discussion would lead to more information of higher value.

How should that process take place? Since it doesn't really seem to be taking place today.

VOLDEN: I'll take this first. That idea of debate, deliberation, dialogue is essential to good lawmaking, in my view, and so to the extent that it's not existing or not existing at the level that we're interested in, that's deeply problematic for the functioning of Congress. Why it matters is, a bill in a winner-take-all fashion might be good for one party or for one immediate goal, but it's not good for the long term. And there are a lot of instances where somebody comes up with a good idea, and it's their strongest opponent that helps refine that idea into what's good policy long term.

I think debate and deliberation in Congress should be mainly done in committees and subcommittees. A lot more than it is thus far. And so those processes that strengthen committees and subcommittees would be beneficial along those lines.

Much of that debate shouldn't be for show—shouldn't be in public. We've done some work that says that the show horses versus the work horses dynamic is still well alive, and it's taking place on cable news networks, and so on, and that's not really the true dialogue and expertise and deliberation that we need for lawmaking in Congress.

CHERVENAK: Great. So, it sounds like it should happen at the committee and subcommittee level and potentially without the cameras on.

VOLDEN: That's the way I would see it, but simultaneously to get it there, we need the other sources of power like those who are interested in the show horse approach or the party leaders to give up some of the power that they have thus far. Skeptical on that being a reform idea that's likely to work immediately.

CHERVENAK: Right. Alan?

WISEMAN: I think I'd just emphasize a point that Craig was raising, and that being that even though we might have these classic images of members of the House debating policy or really nuanced aspects of policy on the floor of the chamber, I'm just really not sure how constructive that is if none of these members are specialists or have the necessary expertise. But one of the reasons why we have this division of labor in both the House and the Senate in terms of committees and subcommittees is to match individual members and their own expertise with particular policy areas, or alternatively giving them incentives to cultivate that expertise so they could hopefully rise to leadership positions in these committees.

All of which is to say that by construction we have these subgroups of legislators who are hopefully either experts or cultivate expertise that could help facilitate meaningful policy debate. And I would hope, or yearn for, a reinvigoration of policy debate at the committee and subcommittee level so that when these bills are being cultivated people are better informed about both the need for said legislation as well as the likely consequences of it.

VOLDEN: One area that I'd point to that maybe has greater possibility of moving forward are a variety of caucuses. So, these are opportunities for members of similar interests to get together and compare ideas. And some of those are bipartisan, which we appreciate. Some are not. But even those that are not, we've studied these ideological factions or caucuses in Congress, and those tend to serve a role. We find that they serve a role particularly for members of the minority to keep it engaged and interested in the lawmaking process. But that might be another source where we can get some of that dialogue and expertise built up.

CHERVENAK: Next question is, What fundamental institutional improvement should Congress make within fifty years?

VOLDEN: Go on ahead, Alan.

WISEMAN: Thank you. Well, just to keep on hitting on a common theme in our work, we have—. Lawmaking in the broadest sense is a labor-intensive process. Members of Congress have increasingly scarce amounts of time with which to balance their competing needs of the day. Or the week. Or the month, so to speak. So, from my perspective, any institutional reforms that could facilitate the cultivation of expertise or the creation of resources that would help members of Congress learn more about what they're voting on, learn more about the needs for said legislation, and likely consequences of that legislation, as well as possibly influencing the ways in which members of Congress spend their workday—and by that, I mean the amount of time they actually spend in Washington, DC, possibly cultivating relations both with members of their own party as well as members of the other party—could presumably go a long way toward cultivating an effective lawmaking environment.

A common theme that we hear—we can both read about in biographies or congressional histories—but something that Craig and I have both heard firsthand from members of Congress who are still in the House, who have been in the House since the '70s and '80s as well as those who had served previously, was the fact that we all know the day-to-day life of a member of Congress changed pretty significantly in the mid-1990s when members of the House in particular no longer moved their families out to Washington, DC, and they'd head back to their districts, you know, essentially on Thursday evening in most cases and come back on Monday or Tuesday, depending on the member. And practically speaking, when you compress the face-to-face workweek into a relatively short period of time, under the best circumstances, it's going to limit the opportunities for face-to-face interaction with cultivation of meaningful work relationships with people that are outside your normal sphere.

And many members of Congress, both current and past, speak to the ways in which this really led to the degradation of the quality of the lawmaking process, so to speak. Largely just because people had really never cultivated any meaningful relationships without that—. We could obviously talk about the ways in which trust can't be built over time, but independent of that, people just aren't able to really assess the scope of the comparative skills and expertise across the chambers with which people might want to try to build bridges with people who have better expertise than them on those issues.

So once again, we're in a situation in which in contemporary times members of the House and Senate might not really be able to take advantage of some of their most valuable resources—and that being other members of the chamber—because they're not put in positions that could facilitate these meaningful relationships.

CHERVENAK: So, you would add more time in Washington?

WISEMAN: I would be amenable to that reform, or alternatively ways in which we could also cultivate relationships perhaps outside of Washington as well. But it strikes me that—and I say this not basing this on large sample data analysis, this is just observation—the work of a member of Congress is notably more complicated now than it was thirty, forty, fifty years ago. We as a society, and members of Congress in particular, I don't think are suffering for lack of information. Because the ease with which a member of Congress can acquire information about a wide array of topics both relevant to their own legislation now as well as potential pieces of legislation is incredible compared to twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years ago.

But as the ease of information acquisition has skyrocketed, we've obviously become plagued by poverty of attention. People are being pulled in so many different directions. There's questions as to how to prioritize this information. And definitely building on some of our work—and this is emphasized by other people and follows from other large sample empirical studies—we've also essentially seen a hollowing out of staff in this time.

Members of Congress in the broadest sense are being spread incredibly thin, so anything we can do to help reinforce efforts to engage in the lawmaking process, including face-to-face or virtual face-to-face relationships [inaudible] would be helpful.

CHERVENAK: Great. Craig?

VOLDEN: We see lots and lots of proposals to reform or improve Congress, and there are a couple broad branches of that that I tend to be skeptical on. One is where, hey, that sounds good, but the people who are in power would never let that happen. So, we want to be dismissive of those. And the second is, Congress used to be great, let's get it back to the way that it was. Again, not acknowledging that a lot has changed over time.

So, the ones that I'm moved toward at this point are information age solutions. The fact that we can reform Congress in ways just by providing good information to the right people at the right time. And part of the reason why we're so excited about our effective lawmaking work is [that],

to the extent that voters want to know who is an effective lawmaker and want to know objectively, that information is available now.

To the extent that a staffer is thinking about applying for a job and who do I want to work for, or a small interest group that doesn't know the congressional community very well is finding out, you know, Who is taking a lead in transportation policy? Who is taking a lead in health policy at this point in time? Maybe I could work for them or with them. Again, making that information available.

It's not going to solve everything, and as we've seen with a lot of social media, too much information or biased information is problematic. And thus, we need some degree of nonpartisan institutions. Some degree of experts and comparative advantage there where people are trusting on both sides of the aisle from the very liberal to the very conservative, and where we take their considerations into account.

I think that level of expertise and information—there's talk about bringing back the Office of Technology Assessment or strengthening CRS [or] giving more resources to legislative counsel—all of that are in the information [and] building up expertise approaches, and those are the ones that I'm drawn toward.

CHERVENAK: Great. What book or article most shaped your thinking with respect to congressional reform?

VOLDEN: I was going to throw out two here. One is something that both Alan and I were very familiar with in graduate school. Keith Krehbiel's *Information and Legislative Organization*. Really a book that shows how you can combine some of those interests that I had—the game theoretic approaches, the empirical analysis—and shows the importance of information and expertise in Congress. So, the types of things we were talking about at that point in time.

The other one I would point to is Eric Schickler's *Disjointed Pluralism*, where he is basically tracking all of the reforms over the past hundred plus years. And the takeaway there for me is that the coalitions for reforms are changing so much from one reform effort to the next that even if we have a good idea, unless you have the coalition to get it done, that reform isn't going to take place. And those coalitions are changing all the time.

CHERVENAK: Alan?

WISEMAN: I would second Craig's suggestions. I think those are both important and really well-written books that I value a lot. In addition to that, a book that doesn't necessarily deal with Congress per se but does deal with legislative politics, which definitely has informed my perspective on how to engage in some of the work we do right now, is Thad Kousser's book *Term Limits and the Dismantling of State Legislative Professionalism*, in which Thad is essentially trying to understand, What are the consequences of legislative term limits in the broadest sense? Which is a very important question. We're trying to understand many aspects of the design of legislative institutions and the efficacy of representative democracy.

And in the United States, of course, if we're thinking about this at the congressional level—this obviously was a hot button issue in the nineties—but we simply don't have term limits for members of the House and Senate, but if we think about what has occurred in the state legislatures, there's quite a bit of variance in terms of those states that do or do not have term limits, when they were phased in, and the like. And by engaging in theoretically motivated large sample empirical analysis, Thad is able to provide us with some insights and potentially some guidance about the institutional consequences of tweaking with the institutions themselves.

And when I think about many of the questions that Craig and I are trying to engage with at the congressional level, this is very much the way in which we're trying to approach this research. To come up with a very well-articulated and clear question regarding what are the consequences of X, and then try to turn to a rigorous large sample analysis of the data to provide us with guidance on our question. And in many cases, as we've found now, especially as our efforts have moved to understanding lawmaking effectiveness in state legislatures, we're actually in a position where we can think about the lessons that could be drawn from our analysis of state legislatures to provide us with guidance about what the likely consequences might be of tweaking with different forms of institutions at the congressional level.

For all of those different reasons, I think that book is very useful for informing my thinking.

CHERVENAK: Great. Well, why don't we conclude here with, just broadly speaking—and we've touched on it a bit already—but where do you want to take the research? Your next ten years or so. What questions do you think are important to look at for your own work and for others? And where do you see your career moving forward from here? Craig, why don't we go back to you?

VOLDEN: Right. So, I'm very enthusiastic about this legislative effectiveness work and hoping to continue with that for a decade and beyond. And within that, the three that I'm most excited about are continuing our Building a Better Congress project that Alan was describing with the work on identification, cultivation, and accountability.

The second is, as we're turning to more issues area scores, our portfolios project, and seeing which members introduce in which areas and why.

And then the third is our work turning to state legislatures, where as Alan was just talking, we're scoring every state legislator over the past twenty years and able to find those legislative bodies that through luck of their institutional design or through conscious choice have found things that work really well. And we'd be interested in seeing whether those could spread elsewhere or spread to Congress and beyond.

CHERVENAK: Great. Alan?

WISEMAN: Obviously, I'm in a very similar position to Craig. We're both drawn to this project in the broadest sense, and I expect and hope that we're both going to be working on it, really, for the duration of our careers in different aspects of it. I think one broad goal that I also have in

addition to engaging in these specific research points that Craig was raising is hopefully to continue to cultivate a cohort of scholars that are also drawn to these questions as well.

In the broadest sense, I think it's fair to argue that Congress is a very important lawmaking institution. I'm hoping I'm not going out on a limb in saying that. But even though many of us know quite a bit about some of the formal rules and processes, really, where the rubber hits the road there's still so many questions that all of us have in terms of how it functions. And likewise, what is potentially possible or perhaps less possible by people that want to advance their initiatives and goals through the legislative process.

And Congress is also a very interesting body. It's a decision-making institution where you have 435 individuals. No one is basically the boss—where the rubber hits the road, the extent to which everyone interacts with each other is entirely based on willingness and volunteerism and consensus, or lack thereof at times—and given that they face these relatively unique incentives compared to almost any other work environment that you can think of, it raises some very interesting questions to me in terms of how the day-to-day process of lawmaking occurs. And likewise, how preferences of the mass public, or alternatively interested stakeholders, can be translated into policy.

I think we have some broad insights to some aspects of those questions, but many others just haven't really been studied for years. And we have a great cohort of scholars of all different ranks that are interested in these questions now. We're also blessed with having technology and access to data sources that we simply have just never had at this point with which to try to engage with these questions.

CHERVENAK: Well, it's great work. And really looking forward to the next steps and digging deeper into the state side of things, and also looking further at the national level. Appreciate you joining me today and thanks so much for you time.

VOLDEN: Thanks, Matthew. Thanks for highlighting our work.

WISEMAN: Thanks for the time, Matthew.