

CHAPTER 39

CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATION

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“How well are we being represented in Washington D.C.?”

One answer to this question can be found in *Roll Call*, an independent newspaper of politics and personalities widely read on Capitol Hill. One of its annual studies, “Clout on the Hill,” notes the power of each state’s congressional delegation according to a complicated list of factors, like members’ seniority and the posts they hold.

For the 103rd Congress (1993/94), Hawai‘i ranks thirty-third in “clout,” even though our population, according to the 1990 census, places us fortieth of fifty states. Not bad for a small, isolated state far from Washington.

“Bringing home the bacon.” One of the factors that *Roll Call* and many others consider in ranking clout is how much each state receives in federal funds. It’s fashionable these days to stick one’s nose up at old-style pork-barrel politics, but looking after the home front is taken for granted in Washington. All members do it, and failure to do so is seen as the way to lose elections.

It’s been estimated that Hawai‘i received one dollar in federal spending for every 92 cents paid in federal taxes for 1992. But then, numbers don’t tell the whole story. How is the money spent? The answer is not entirely satisfying. Per capita defense spending in Hawai‘i was fourth *highest* in the nation in 1990. But for all nondefense

spending, Hawai'i was fifth lowest. Not so hot.

Beyond the numbers. *Roll Call*'s clout survey is purely quantitative calculation. It tells nothing about such subjective topics as what members of Congress have accomplished or what reputations they have.

Few major bills or programs carry the name of a Hawai'i lawmaker, with the possible exception of the late Senator Spark Matsunaga's work, most notably the apology and reparations for Japanese Americans wrongfully interned during World War II. Nor are Hawai'i legislators big players in national debates on budgets, taxes, and war or the reorganization of Congress and reform of campaign spending laws.

One political science professor in Washington who follows Congress closely had this to say about the Hawai'i delegation: "Overall, my impression is they are a poor bunch. They are better known for constituent services and protecting major industries like defense, tourism and, to a lesser extent, agriculture." That sounds critical, but it would be taken as a compliment by many in Congress; there are worse "sins" than taking good care of constituents.



Senator Daniel Inouye

Senator Daniel Inouye. In Washington, Senator Inouye is regarded with respect and even an awe that in some quarters borders on dread. He is acknowledged as an inside player of consummate skill and long experience, extremely knowledgeable in such areas as military spending and foreign aid, and a hard bargainer for causes he believes in. He is a very private man, reserved, and aloof to the point of seeming arrogant.

Inouye is legendary for his loyalty to the institution of the Senate and to his colleagues there. His key role in the two most important ethics cases since World War II (Watergate and Iran-contra) put

him in a position to defend other senators, including the notorious "Keating Five" of the savings-and-loan scandals. That won him no points at home, but he did earn the gratitude of fellow senators, adding to his influence.

Inouye, who has sat on the powerful Appropriations Committee since 1971, now also chairs its subcommittee on defense, making him one of the so-called cardinals in Congress.

Is Inouye's hand on the defense purse strings all that crucial? Most defense dollars for Hawai'i would probably be spent here anyway at the behest of Pentagon brass. As evidence of Hawai'i's strategic value in the Pacific, in two rounds of base closings by an impartial, independent commission immune to congressional meddling, the state fared better than many others. It lost only one major—but not critical—base.

But Inouye's position does more than give him a huge say in *how* defense dollars are spent in Hawai'i; just as important, it enables him to take care of the wishes of other senators who control other federal spending Hawai'i may need. That's how the Washington game of trade-offs is played, and Inouye is Hawai'i's heaviest hitter.

Inouye also chairs the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, a politically thankless task, though its jurisdiction includes native Hawaiians. But some people (and not just Hawaiian activists) ask if Inouye is happier spending time on mainland Indian reservations than laboring at the difficult task of gaining federal recognition for Hawaiians, like that of other native Americans, to say nothing of some form of sovereignty.

Inouye has long been a jealous guardian of his good reputation for the highest personal integrity. But he has had his well-publicized embarrassments. In 1987, he inserted into the foreign aid budget \$8 million to build religious schools for North African Jews living in France. In 1990, he sought to provide \$50 million in federal funds to expand the hospital at private George Washington University in Washington, where he graduated and served as a trustee. Both appropriations were withdrawn or blocked when they drew public attention. But such actions led one Honolulu columnist to label Inouye the "prince of pork." Unlike most "pork," these monies did nothing for Hawai'i.

Senator Daniel Akaka.

Senator Akaka is still too junior in the Senate to aspire to any substantial leadership or committee post, even if he would be comfortable in that sort of limelight. His assignments, like Veterans Affairs and Governmental Operations, have some value to Hawai'i, but they are not the choicest to be had.

Akaka was seen as a Democratic party stalwart but something of a nonentity while he served fourteen years in the House. Being in the much smaller Senate has barely given



Senator Daniel Akaka

him a higher profile, although he chairs a minor subcommittee of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Asked about his major goals, he expounds on his efforts at educating fellow senators about Hawai'i rather than discuss particulars of Hawai'i's needs, much less controversial national issues.

But, like Senator Matsunaga before him, Akaka is extremely amiable. He is seen as a fellow who looks after Hawai'i's interests first, foremost, and finally. With his genial personality and gentle manner, when he asks for something important to Hawai'i in his heartfelt way, he must be hard to turn down.

Akaka, the first senator of Hawaiian ancestry, also sits on Inouye's Indian Affairs Committee. He got the Senate to agree to a resolution of apology for the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom in time for the centennial commemoration in January 1993, but he was deeply disappointed when the House refused to act.

Akaka may not have the intellect or breadth of esoteric interests that Matsunaga brought to the Senate, but many who deal with him often come away with the sense that Akaka is almost certainly a lot smarter than he lets on.





**Representative
Neil Abercrombie**



**Representative
Patsy Mink**

Representatives Neil Abercrombie and Patsy Mink. Hawai'i's two House representatives, Neil Abercrombie and Patsy Mink, have similar liberal voting records and both are described as feisty, opinionated, and outspoken. But in many other ways they are a study in contrasts. He is haole flashy, she AJA reserved. He is easygoing with staff, taking their friendly criticism in stride; she prides herself as a taskmaster, working herself even longer hours than her staff. His committee choices reflect parochial Hawai'i's needs; hers deal with broader national issues.

Abercrombie's committees parallel Inouye's. On the House Armed Services Committee, says *The Almanac of American Politics*, "he can vote against defense spending generally but for spending to help Honolulu area service families." On the Natural Resources Committee, which controls national parks and other federal lands, Abercrombie sits on the Indian Affairs subcommittee, counterpart of the full committee chaired by Inouye.

Though still best known for his beard, ponytail, and a hip reputation, Abercrombie's combative, sometimes abrasive, '60s radical image has mellowed, politically and personally. He surprised many by leading

a spirited fight for the "three-martini lunch," more soberly known as the tax deduction for business travel and entertainment expenses, in the name of saving tourism and restaurant industry jobs. And he goes out of his way to be a more convivial, sympathetic listener to other members.

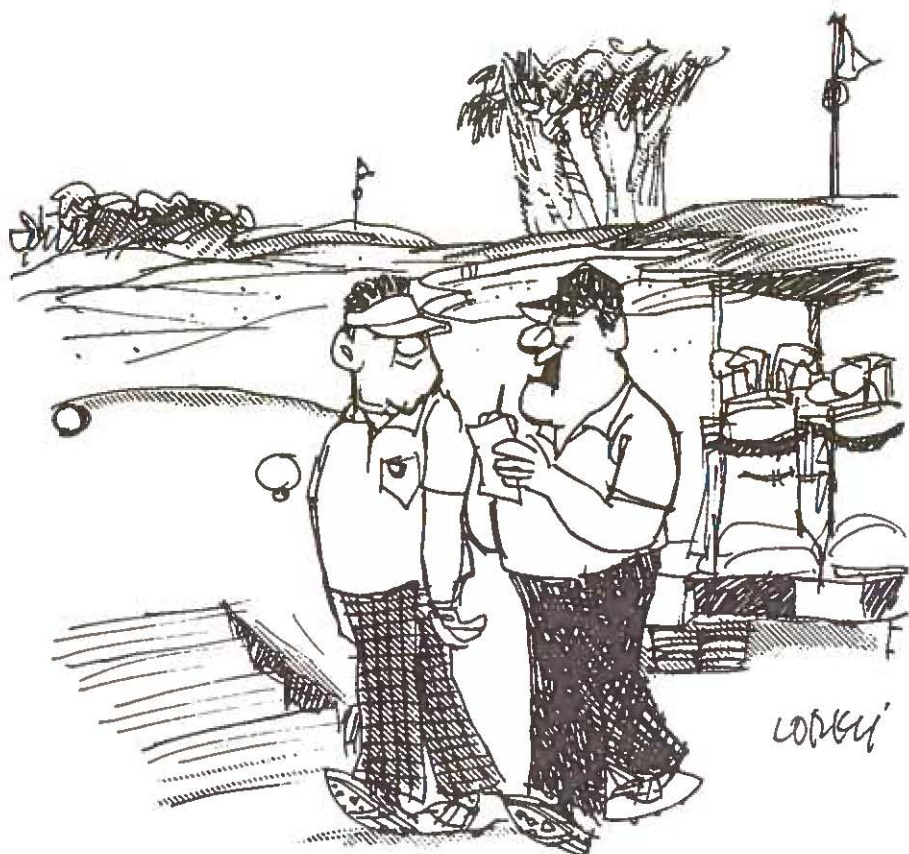
Patsy Mink, returning after a thirteen-year absence, lost the seniority from her previous six terms in Congress. But she can draw on her acquaintance with senior members now risen to positions of power. She took up where she left off, with reassignment to the Committee on Education and Labor, lifelong interests to her. She also serves again on Natural Resources and on the Budget Committee, which brings prestige if not great power.

As a trail-blazing Japanese American woman lawyer, Mink has also dealt with women's equity issues all her life and remains a very active leader in the Congressional Women's Caucus. Caucus leaders pushed her for an important leadership position in 1992 and, though not chosen, she was elected to the influential Democratic party panel that assigns members to committees.

Mink is seen as an extremely serious, principled legislator, dependably liberal but not afraid to go against the party leadership on matters of importance, as can be seen by her strong opposition to NAFTA—the free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico—which would be harmful to the Hawaiian sugar industry.

Ultimate standard. In Washington, members of Congress are judged by many standards: ability to legislate, skill at communication, political agility, even honesty and integrity. Power is accumulated by longevity and gaining positions of influence in the leadership and on major committees. But, ultimately, power within the institution and the esteem of other lawmakers mean nothing unless members get reelected. So, as a practical matter, it counts little what Washington thinks. The opinion about the job being done by Hawai'i's congressional delegation that counts is the opinion of the majority of those at home who bother to vote.

By that standard, Hawai'i lawmakers have been very successful. Only ambition for higher office, retirement, or death has ever removed a Hawai'i legislator. No member of Congress from Hawai'i has ever been voted out of office by the people.



"RELAX-YOU AND I KNOW A LI'L GOLF GAME DIDN'T
INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION OR YOUR VOTE..."