*Congressional Parties, Institutional Ambition, and the Financing of Majority Control* in the Classroom

Statement and discussion questions supplied by authors Eric S. Heberlig and Bruce A. Larson

Nearly all of the current studies of congressional parties and leaders focus on party influence in the *legislative* process. But as we show in this book, the ongoing battle for majority control of the U.S. House has transformed congressional parties from legislative coalitions to partisan *fundraising* machines. In particular, because of the close competition for majority party control of the U.S. House of Representatives since 1994, the Republican and Democratic Parties have made large donations to the party and its candidates a requirement for House incumbents seeking to advance within party and committee leadership hierarchies. For example, whereas House members donated less than $3 million to their parties and other candidates in 1990, they donated more than $100 million in 2008. By documenting and making sense of these trends, our book demonstrates the substantial impact that the fight for majority party control has had on the congressional parties and points to some potentially troubling developments in how the contemporary congressional parties now function. Moreover, by incorporating new party fundraising developments into current theoretical perspectives on congressional parties, we build a long-overdue bridge between the literature on party campaigning and the literature on congressional party organization.

1. How has the role of congressional incumbents changed over time in financing congressional elections? Why?
2. Why do members of Congress contribute generously to their party and its candidate? Why didn’t most members contribute much prior to 1994? Why most members contribute generously now?
3. Why have parties increasingly relied on incumbents as fundraising “brokers?” Why are incumbents good sources of funds for parties?
4. What is the link between ambition and fundraising in Congress? How have parties been able to channel members’ ambition towards the parties’ goals?
5. How have party leaders’ jobs changed since the beginning of the battle for majority status?
6. Heberlig and Larson argue that parties promote members who are devoted to the collective good of the party rather than those who “pay to play.” What evidence do they show to support this?
7. How do parties criteria for advancement change over time?
8. How do incumbents pay for the increased fundraising demands of the party? How have the changed their fundraising behaviors?
9. Who is paying for the increased fundraising activities of members of Congress? What might be the normative concerns about these donors playing an increased role in contributing to members of Congress in leadership positions?
10. Is their evidence that members of Congress “burnout” from fundraising demands and retire because of the fundraising pressures?
11. Congress is supposed to be an institution in which policy is based on the will of the majority. How do the party operations described in this book pull policy away from the ideologically moderate majority of the public and towards the more ideologically extreme preferences of party activists and the parties’ interest group allies?