

REWRITTEN AND UPDATED from an original simulation by The Dirksen Congressional Election Center (ILLINOIS)



Simulation Case Studies (Revised for Taft Project)

The simulation includes five case studies, each of which is intended to teach different lessons about congressional elections. The central aspects of each case are summarized below. Teachers can use anywhere from one to five of these cases in class (see the section on [How to Play the Game](#)). These sketches could be provided to students if teachers desire student input into which case(s) the class chooses for the simulation.

In introducing the simulation to students, teachers may want to consult "Resources for Case Studies." Students will find this section useful, too.

- ▶ Case Study #1 - Congressman Pothole Loses Touch
- ▶ Case Study #2 - The All-Out Ideological War
- ▶ Case Study #3 - The Scandal
- ▶ Case Study #4 - The Extremist
- ▶ Case Study #5 - The Redistricting
- ▶ How to Teach with the Case Studies
- ▶ Resources for Case Studies



Case Study # 1: Congressman Pothole Loses Touch

This case study is the story of long-term Congressman Max Dodge, a Democrat who may have lost touch with his increasingly Republican district. Dodge has built up a slim legislative record but has a long record of bringing pork barrel benefits back to the district. He hopes that this will help him withstand the toughest challenge he has ever faced in his career, being waged by popular Republican state senator Charles Green.

The District

Congressman Dodge's district has changed in subtle ways since he was first elected. The district is suburban and for years has had a slim Democratic majority. That has begun to change in recent years. New communities have grown up in the district and have attracted a group of voters more in tune with the Religious Right; they favor abortion restrictions, school prayer, and large tax cuts. Furthermore, the union base in the district has dried up somewhat, as union jobs have moved away. Many of the remaining union households actually sympathize quite a bit with the Republican Party, especially on non-economic issues.

The Incumbent - Max Dodge (Democrat)

Congressman Max Dodge (a Democrat) has represented his suburban district for almost twenty years. During the last fourteen of those years, Dodge has served on the Appropriations Committee. He has never been regarded as a "heavy hitter" in Washington; no major legislation bears his name, and nobody would ever rank him as one of the best or most effective members of Congress. In fact, for someone who has been on the Hill for twenty years, he toils in relative anonymity. He chairs a subcommittee on Appropriations, which for most is a source of considerable prestige and power. But for Representative Dodge, even this position has not made him prominent on Capitol Hill.

What Congressman Dodge excels at is constituency service. On the Appropriations Committee, he has brought in much funding for the defense plant located in the adjacent district (a plant that employs many of his constituents). He has brought in funding to do road construction in the district, build new post offices and federal buildings, and has protected various industries in the district from potential harm. Earlier in his career, when Congress passed the Tax Reform Act of 2010, Dodge got critical tax breaks for local companies that employ many of his constituents; even his opponents would concede that his work here helped keep these companies in strong economic shape.

While not particularly ideological, Dodge votes with the majority of his party on most issues. Thus, his voting record tends to be pro-choice, pro-environment, and in favor of more government spending over greater tax cuts. He argued against the size of the proposed \$1.6 trillion Bush tax cut plan, suggesting that it be scaled down. With a growing senior citizen base in the district, Dodge argues against Trump's Medicare reform plan. He also is a strong supporter of public schools, opposing all voucher plans.

Dodge is sixty-four years old. Before entering Congress, he was an insurance agent who was active in local politics. He was a member of the state Democratic Party steering committee for ten years. When the local incumbent retired, Dodge ran for the seat and won fairly easily. He continues to make the 1200-mile round-trip to return home every weekend that Congress is in session. A local saying is that you can't get into a high school football game in the district without shaking Max Dodge's hand.

For the first fourteen years he was in Congress, Dodge had a fairly easy time being reelected. Six years ago, he faced a spirited opponent who dubbed him "Mr. Mediocre," pointing out that Dodge really had an undistinguished legislative record. Dodge won, but with less than 60% of the vote. His next two opponents continued on this theme, with one even resurrecting the "Mr. Mediocre" nickname. Each held Dodge to the high-50s in vote percentage. Both, however, ran poorly funded campaigns, and one had some minor scandals to overcome. Dodge has not had any long, sleepless election nights, but his winning margins have been below what one would expect for someone with his seniority.

The Challenger - Charles Green (Republican)

This year, the Republicans have decided to go all out to try to defeat Dodge. They have recruited as a challenger Charles Green, a two-term state senator who currently is the highest-ranking Republican in the State Senate. Green has a conservative voting record, and has also brought many benefits back to those segments of the congressional district that overlaps with his state senate district. He is a strong supporter of the military. Unlike Dodge, however, Green has a distinguished legislative record in the state senate, having been the chief sponsor of state tax cut bills and of the recent Education Bill, which provided money for an experimental vouchers program.

The Analysts

Political analyst Mary Insightful, describes the race as follows: Given the formidable advantages of incumbency, Dodge is still considered the favorite. But he's a lightweight legislatively; Green has more of a record to run on than Dodge does. If Tip O'Neill is right and 'all politics is local,' Dodge can win. If issues start to matter, Green might actually be closer to the prevailing sentiment of the district than Dodge is. Leans Democratic.

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but do not want them to see the consultants' evaluations, simply print the entire case study and mask what follows when photocopying it."

Democratic Party consultant Barry Simon has offered the following advice to Dodge campaign: Keep it local. Your man has no great legislative record to point to, so this race has to constantly hit the things Dodge has done for the district. Among the pork Dodge has brought home to the district are military benefits, which is how he ought to

appeal to the conservative voters in the district. There is a core group of Democrats in the district for whom Dodge can wave the liberal flag. But if he's going to win, he's got to reach the conservatives on the military and other voters on what he has done for the district. We can win this one, but Max Dodge is in the fight of his life.

Republican Party consultant Adam Newman offers this advice to the Green campaign: What the heck has Max Dodge done in twenty years of congressional service? It's wonderful that he's brought stuff to the district, but Charles Green has done that just as well while in the state legislature. What separates the two of them is that Charles Green also has some substance to him.

How to Teach this Case

This case is a basic study of whether congressional elections are local or national events. If they are local events, Dodge wins. His name recognition is greater, more constituents have met him, and he has done more service for the constituency. If they are national events, Green could win. He seems more in tune with where the voters in the district are. Green also could more plausibly make a case that he could provide more "bang for the buck" policy-wise, giving people the chance to have their representative make a positive difference for the entire nation while in Washington. However, Green's margin for error is slim; the district seems only narrowly to favor Republicans on the issues.

Thus, who wins the election depends on what battleground the candidates fight on. Political scientists use the term 'framing' to refer to how candidates try to focus voters' attention. Dodge wants to "frame" this election around "Who can do more for you and your needs?" while Green wants to frame this election around "Who can better go to Washington and do what you would want them to do?" This case nicely highlights the dual nature of Congress and congressional elections - members of Congress represent their district in different ways, and the person who might be best along one dimension may not be the best along others. If I were to use this case, this would be the "big

Case Study #2: The All-Out Ideological War

In an open-seat congressional election, Democrat Mary Rodriguez is running against Republican Kurt Bullard. There is no scandal to get in the way here - this race is simply about issues like abortion, affirmative action, the environment, and income redistribution (taxes). This is likely to be a very close race, putting a premium on the ability of each candidate to energize his or her own voters and pull voters away from the other party.

The District

This district is so diverse that it is every incumbent's nightmare. Thirty years ago, this district was basically urban (centered around the city of Heartland) with some smaller pieces of suburbia. As the city has shrunk over the last twenty years, the district has twice been redistricted so that it now includes almost an even split of urban and suburban voters. Any ideology can claim to have some support within the district, but nobody has been able to tame it. Thus, this is one of the most volatile and competitive districts in the country, and always attracts the attention of the national parties.

Within the last twelve years, this district has been represented in succession by a conservative Republican who championed right-to-life positions, a liberal Democrat who urged higher taxes and redistributive social spending, a fiscally conservative yet socially moderate Republican, and a staunchly pro-union Democrat. Each of these incumbents either met with defeat or chose to abandon this district to make a run for higher office. In the last election, Tony DeMarco, a pro-union Democrat, was reelected for a second term with 52% of the vote. For DeMarco, this actually represented an improvement over his first election, when he won by 801 votes. DeMarco is retiring from his congressional seat to wage a long-shot campaign for governor. This year, both parties held competitive primaries and, in the end, chose true ideologues to run for this seat.

The Democrat - Mary Rodriguez

The Democrats have nominated State Representative Mary Rodriguez, 33, a Latina woman who has held elective office since she graduated from college. After 4 years on the Heartland City Council, Rodriguez ran for the state house and was victorious. She is giving up a safe district in the state house to seek this congressional seat. She describes herself as "a woman who believes that, when run effectively, government can help to solve societal problems. Government is not the enemy."

Rodriguez is a liberal. She favors higher taxes on the wealthy and redistributing income to the poorer sections of the country. She is pro-environment, which resonates well with the "green" elements in the suburbs. She favors increased federal involvement in health care - she has commented that "national health insurance is the only long-term solution and it is just a matter of time until people see that." Rodriguez is a very strong affirmative action supporter; in college, she was arrested at a pro-affirmative action rally on campus. Rodriguez tries to downplay her pro-choice stand on abortion, as it runs the risk of offending the heavily Catholic Latino constituency living in the city of Heartland.

The Republican - Kurt Bullard

For the Republicans, the nomination went to Kurt Bullard, 56, a vice-president with Olsen Furniture, one of the state's largest furniture companies (and the biggest single employer in the district). Bullard has never run for public office before. He was moved to run by what he feels are anti-business policies being passed by the Democrats. He also strongly opposes abortion and affirmative action - "I overcame obstacles and made it without preferential treatment in hiring. That's the American way." He derides Rodriguez' positions on healthcare as advocating "socialized medicine."

Bullard is also proud to call himself a "citizen legislator." In a recent newspaper interview, he attempted to remind voters that "there is a world out there outside of government service. My opponent has been sponging off the government since she graduated from college." Bullard views it as his job to "give something back" by taking time off from running his business to serve in Congress. He has pledged to serve no more than three terms in Congress and then return home.

The Analysts

Political analyst Mary Insightful describes the race as follows: This is a clear-cut ideological battle between two candidates who each seem to have a decent shot of winning. The district is split in such a way that either candidate could win this one. I think the affirmative action issue slightly favors Bullard, especially given Rodriguez's extremism on the issue. The environment favors Rodriguez, as this is one issue on which the suburban voters look like liberals. Income redistribution seems an evenly split issue in the district. Abortion is the wildcard. Rodriguez has a whole bunch of Catholic voters in the city who are inclined to support her except for on the abortion issue. If she can hold their votes, I think she wins. If not, Bullard could take this. Toss-up.

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Democratic Party consultant Barry Simon has offered the following advice to the Rodriguez campaign: We need to do two things. First, we need to energize our base. We must strongly reach out to the urban voters on affirmative action, the environment, health care, and liberal income redistribution policies. This also involves minimizing the prominence of abortion for Catholic voters. Second, we need to grab the wedge issues that will pull the suburban voters toward us. That means hitting the environment repeatedly. This is the strategy that could win it for us, although this will be very tight.

Republican Party consultant Adam Newman offers this advice to the Bullard campaign: Seems to me we have an ultra-liberal running here. Her positions on affirmative action are well outside the mainstream, and her positions on high taxes and high spending are typical of failed liberal policies. We've got to hammer home these points to the suburbs. And, we have to go to the urban part of the district and hammer home the fact that Rodriguez is pro-choice; this is at odds with her core constituency. If we can pull this coalition apart a little bit, we can win. We don't need to win the city. If all we do is cut her margins slightly, or depress turnout there, this one is ours.

How to Teach this Case

This is a fun case for anybody who enjoys ideology and policy debates. This case allows a teacher to get students talking about and debating issues. Abortion, affirmative action, the environment, and income redistribution (taxes) are prominently featured in this case. There is no scandal to get in the way here - successful campaigns will use issue positions both to try and energize their own voters and to try to pull away voters from the other party. The campaign is also expected to be so close that students can really feel things are up for grabs.

This campaign also may allow for issues related to career politicians and term limits to be raised. Students can be asked to think about arguments for and against congressional term limits (and career politicians in general). This issue does not have to be a major part of the campaign; certainly, Rodriguez would never want to bring it up. But, a nice subtext here could be a citizen-legislator arguing for why that is good versus a career politician arguing for the benefits of experience.

Case Study #3 - The Scandal

Democrat John Violet had a safe seat in this district where Democrats outnumber Republicans by two-to-one. Then, he was arrested for drunk driving in an well-publicized incident. Although Violet has dealt reasonably well with the scandal, it remains a concern to his campaign. The Republican nominee, Richard Casper, a

The District

This district is a liberal urban/suburban district. It is mainly blue-collar, with a significant minority of African-American and Latino voters. They reside mostly within the central city of Ogden. The urban part of the district also includes large numbers of pro-union factory workers who make automobiles; therefore, the auto industry has a big impact of this district. The suburban part of the district is small (about 25 percent of the district lives outside the city). these voters tend to vote Republican, although they are far from ideological (for the most part). Generally, this district has been very friendly to Democrats at both the national and local level.

The Incumbent - John Violet (Democrat)

Up until six months ago, the Republicans would have had no hopes of ever picking up this seat. Democrat John Violet was a three-term incumbent in a district in which Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1. Violet has been popular with his constituents, as he was reelected with over 70% of the vote in November 2000. He is among the more liberal of Democrats in Congress, very much in favor of stricter environmental regulations (he was one of the leaders in opposing President Bush's plan to allow drilling for oil in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge). Violet is also a strong supporter of public education; he has made the public university in the district one of the state's top recipients of federal dollars. He also is a champion at bringing federal dollars to the district for such things as road construction.

The Scandal

In May, just after the filing deadline for the primary, Violet was arrested for drunk driving three blocks from his house. Police pulled Violet over after he was seen driving erratically. Violet was captured on police videotape threatening the officers by telling them, "I'm a <expletive deleted> Congressman! I'll get your <expletive deleted> badge!" Needless to say, it was a damaging event. This was compounded by the fact that it happened on a slow news day; this was a front-page story, and videotape of the incident was broadcast repeatedly on TV.

Violet apologized for his actions, pled guilty to driving while intoxicated, and was sentenced to two years of probation, 80 hours of community service, and had his driver's license suspended for ninety days. He voluntarily entered an alcohol abuse program and claims to be completely sober since the arrest. He has steadfastly refused to resign his seat, saying that "I have made a mistake and been dealt with by the courts. I do not believe that this one mistake makes me ineligible to continue giving the district the high-quality representation I have given for almost six years."

The Challenger - Richard Casper (Republican)

Since Violet appeared strong before the arrest, all strong Republicans in the district passed up the chance to challenge him. The Republican nomination went to Richard Casper, a small business owner. Casper is active in local Republican politics and sought the nomination when he realized nobody else would. "Nobody should run without opposition. That's not democracy," Casper told a local reporter on the day he filed. Casper, however, is young (34), has no political background, and little experience on the issues. He is, relatively speaking, a lightweight.

People in the district still note that Violet still possesses formidable advantages. He's on the right side of the issues as far as this district is concerned. He's smart and articulate, a champion of local interests, and widely perceived as more qualified than Casper. However, scandals sometimes cause incumbents to lose. While nobody but the staunchest Republicans are predicting and Casper win, even the staunchest Democrats are predicting that this is a race to be watched.

The Analysts

Political analyst Mary Insightful describes the race as follows: Representative John Violet is being challenged here in a Democratic district. Violet has done a nice job representing the interests and ideology of this district during the first six years he has been in Congress. And, while he foolishly got himself embroiled in the drunken-driving incident, he has handled it as well as can be expected. In my view, for Casper to win one of two things must happen. First, more evidence must come forward showing Violet is unfit to serve in Congress. There's little likelihood of that. Second, Casper must convince many loyal Democratic voters that their Democratic representative exercised such poor judgment that he should be booted from office and replaced with a Republican. Unlikely to happen. Leans Democratic.

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Democratic Party consultant Barry Simon offered this advice to the Violet campaign: As I see it, there's only one issue that's making this a race, and that's the unfortunate arrest. Without that, the ballgame is over. I think we must move, quickly, to neutralize this issue. Our man made a mistake. He admits it. The courts have adjudicated the matter. There's no 'pattern' of poor judgment or anything else like that. One mistake. Our candidate has repeatedly said that this one mistake does not disqualify him from continuing to do the job of representing his constituents. If John Violet can impress upon the people what a fine representative he has been, they will see he deserves their forgiveness and the chance to continue to represent their interests in Washington.

Republican Party consultant Barry Newman offered this advice to the Casper campaign: Before Violet's drunk driving arrest, this wasn't a race we were tracking at all. Now, we're looking at it a bit more, but still not expecting victory. Frankly, we wish this arrest had happened earlier to allow us time to mobilize our strongest potential challenger. Casper needs to demonstrate that he's more than a lucky guy who stumbled into a freak situation. The only chance he has in this election is to win the debate, big time. When he shows he's capable enough to be a congressman, then he becomes a really viable challenger.

When trying to win in a situation such as this one, things get awkward. You don't want to get into name-calling or other such things. The fact that Violet also entered rehab and is now doing well means we need to give him space to deal with what is in many ways a personal matter. But, doing what he did showed remarkably poor judgment. The only way we'll beat this incumbent is if we make the voters believe that someone showing judgment this poor should not hold this seat.

How to Teach this Case

This case presents a fairly typical setting - a seat that is on paper safe for one of the parties. Most districts are like this, which is why in any given year over 80% of congressional races are not really competitive. Now, due to unusual circumstances, one of the 80% has become competitive. Representative Violet probably could have served for a long time in this district, attracting little opposition. But the scandal may have caused some voters to reexamine Violet and decide anew whether he is right for this seat. Both campaigns will have the challenge of dealing with the drunk-driving arrest. Violet will have to minimize its effects on the campaign, while Casper will need to fan its flames for electoral gain, all the while being careful not to "cross the line" (such as by calling Violet a drunk).

Two additional issues present themselves in this case. First, there is the issue of quality challengers (see the [Resources for Teachers](#) section). The Republicans ran a poor challenger because Violet's strong chance of winning discouraged others from running. Now, they certainly wish they had a stronger challenger. With all the damage the drunk-driving arrest did to Violet, the Republicans will need an unexpectedly strong debate performance and campaign performance from Casper to have a chance.

Finally, this case presents an opportunity to discuss issues such as personal life and political office. A teacher might want to engage students in a discussion about whether a personal scandal should disqualify someone from office, especially when they deal with it as properly as Violet did. This could be compared with Bill Clinton's or Gary Condit's stonewalling in the Monica Lewinsky and Chandra Levy episodes, respectively. This kind of debate, which obviously has no correct answers, might be interesting to have in class.

Case Study #4 - The Extremist

Republican incumbent Peter Fairchild is very conservative on social issues, being one of the leaders of the pro-life caucus in the House and a strong supporter of school prayer. While those kind of Christian Right positions seem to play well in the district, Democrat Scott Sykes is running a campaign alleging that Fairchild may be devoting too much time to these social issues and not enough time and energy to the farm crisis that plagues this district. Sykes must overcome his "incorrect" position on abortion if he hopes to win.

The District

Have you ever driven on the back roads connecting towns of 10,000-40,000 in population? If so, you've seen this district. It passes through numerous small towns (and rural communities) in six counties in this Farm Belt state. These towns are characterized by their two-block long Main Streets, churches, and Kiwanis Clubs. The district is almost entirely white and Christian. Small business and family farms predominate. The people here generally do not want government on their backs, except when it comes to federal support for farming. The district also surprised many when it almost voted for Bill Clinton in 1992 - much of this, analysts concluded, was because of small business concern over the rising cost of health insurance. This exception aside, these are conservative, small government, church-going people. In the last year, some local family farms have been forced to sell out to larger, agribusiness interests. Family farmers in this district have increasingly come to believe that small farms face numerous economic obstacles, which has precipitated some concern here. In the opinion of many, the Republican zeal to cut the federal budget, and with it farm subsidies, have contributed to the problem. Fairchild generally has voted against such efforts to cut the farm subsidy, but many constituents wonder how actively he has pursued this issue.

The Incumbent - Peter Fairchild (Republican)

Some members of Congress are consensus-oriented, compromise seekers. This one is not. Peter Fairchild views his job in Congress as being to push his right-wing agenda and to help "educate colleagues who persist in casting misguided votes." Fairchild grew up in this district as the son of a wheat farmer, attended high school here, and played cornerback on the state college team that won the conference championship sixteen years ago. After college, he came back home and managed a chain of three motor parts stores. At 33, he bought out the owner and became a small businessman.

During this time, Fairchild became active in the local religious scene. A churchgoer all his life, he had a "profound religious transformation" after college and became much more religious. This has had little effect on his views - he always was strongly pro-life, pro-school prayer, and conservative. What it did do was to affect his intensity on these issues. Fairchild became chairperson of the local Right-to-Life chapter, a plaintiff in a lawsuit regarding posting the Ten Commandments in the county courthouse, and vice-chair of the local Christian Coalition chapter.

Six years ago, when the local Republican incumbent congressperson retired, Fairchild ran in a three-way primary for the nomination. He staked out the extreme right-wing position and was victorious over his two moderate rivals (both conceded afterwards that by staying in the race, they had split the moderate vote and allowed Fairchild to win with less than a majority). Fairchild went on to win the general election by 56%-44%. He was reelected with 61% of the vote four years ago and 62% two years ago.

In Congress, Fairchild became vice-chair of the House Pro-Life Caucus and leader of an informal group that aimed to "bring God back to the schoolhouse." He co-sponsors a constitutional amendment banning abortion each session, and has consistently voted against funding abortion in any form in the United States or abroad. He was a fierce critic of Bill Clinton, calling him "the most immoral man to ever hold the presidency." Fairchild caught many headlines last year with his bill to make adultery grounds for forfeiture of all marital assets in a divorce case, as well as to make it a criminal offense punishable by up to five years in jail. The bill died in committee.

Fairchild proudly states that he did not go to Congress to win friends ("That's obvious," a Democratic colleague has noted) or to compromise and pass imperfect legislation. Rather, Fairchild simply believes he is right and that compromise would be "morally wrong." Consequently, he is an advocate for his causes, but not all that successful as a legislator. He concentrates almost exclusively on these social issues.

The Challenger - Scott Sykes (Democrat)

After years of running fairly weak challengers against a succession of Republican incumbents, the Democrats might actually have a strong candidate going this year. Scott Sykes moved to this district from Buffalo eight years ago, and has been working in the district as a regional manager for a large national drug store chain with six stores in the district. Sykes has had no previous political experience. He is, however, from a fairly wealthy family, well-connected in town, and a charming and gregarious man who thus far has done well raising money.

Sykes is pro-choice, although he says he is willing to support some "reasonable" restrictions on abortion. He is a very staunch advocate of increasing the federal support and subsidies to farmers. He tells voters that he is the person who can help them through the difficulties farms are facing. "I will make this my first priority in Congress," he stated when he announced his candidacy. "My opponent has not. If you believe the family farm problem can be solved with a constitutional amendment banning abortion, or some silly law throwing adulterers in jail, vote for my opponent."

The Analysts

Political analyst Mary Insightful describes the race as follows: It is hard for me, but not impossible, to imagine Fairchild losing this election. He comes from the district, speaks their language, and has appeared strong. But, he might be drifting too far right of the district. Remember, his win in the original primary was something of a fluke. And, as a time when his constituents are reaching out to government for economic help, Fairchild

is becoming even more involved in social issues. If Sykes can paint the picture of Fairchild being ideologically extreme and out-of-touch, he could win. Leans Republican.

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Democratic Party consultant Barry Simon has offered the following advice to the Sykes campaign: We can win this one. Your opponent is hopelessly out of touch with where the district is. OK, let's get one thing straight. We're going to take a hit on abortion. We need to keep that issue quiet, perhaps move a bit to the right on the issue, and realize there are some fanatics on the other side who won't be with us. But, we must make the argument, repeatedly, that Fairchild is irresponsible focusing so much attention on this issue when the district needs health insurance reform and assistance to family farms. We also need to repeatedly hit the theme that our guy is a nice person, easy to work with, and the kind who will succeed as a legislator, not as a rigid ideologue.

Republican Party consultant Adam Newman offers this advice to the Fairchild campaign: I don't perceive this challenge as being especially dangerous. You and the district are in substantial agreement on the issues, especially when it comes to abortion and religious-type issues. And, as far as farming issues go, you have always supported family farms. We may need to do an event or commercial to demonstrate even more convincingly how intensely you work on family farm issues. But, really, family farmers cannot claim you have been ignoring them.

How to Teach this Case

This election does nicely to illustrate the concepts of intensity and participation. Fairchild has certainly taken a very intense stand on the issue of abortion, providing him an opportunity to exploit his involvement here for votes. It seems clear to me that he will want to emphasize not just his positions on this issue. He will also want to emphasize, to his pro-life constituency, how intensely he feels about this issue. And, he will want to emphasize the extent to which he has participated in legislative activity around this issue (and also on other issues of concern to the religious right).

On the flip side, Fairchild is being accused of not participating enough on issues dealing with family farmers. While he has voted the right way, rumblings persist that he is not giving enough time and attention to this. The distinction between national and local issues is being raised here. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for Fairchild to sell the district on his commitment to the district, and to this issue. One other important question is how Sykes handles the abortion issue. He is clearly going to take a hit on this issue. Does he do better by being open and up front on this issue, admitting he differs from the constituency and hoping to move past it? Or, should he try to minimize the role of this issue in the campaign? This is an open question.

Case Study #5: The Redistricting

After the most recent census, Democrats in the state of Rockland divided up the district held for fourteen years by Republican Al Sparks into three parts. Sparks has decided not to retire, but instead will challenge Regina Flett, an African-American Democrat who is the incumbent in one of the three districts that holds Sparks's former district. Seventy percent of the new district was in Flett's old district. Can Sparks continue his congressional career by defeating another incumbent on her turf?

The New District

Every ten years, the United States Census is taken. Following the census, congressional seats are reallocated to the states based upon population - a total of 435 seats are awarded (this process is called reapportionment). Then, within each state, congressional seats are redistricted so that each district has an equal population. Many districts change only a small amount after each redistricting; some, like this one, become reborn as something different from what they used to be.

This district is actually a combination of two old districts. After the last census, the state of Rockland lost one congressional seat. The Democrats in the state controlled the redistricting (they had a majority in the state legislature and controlled the governorship). They carved up the 7th congressional district (occupied by a Republican) into three parts - these parts were added to the 4th, 6th, and 9th districts, each controlled by Democrats. The Republican incumbent whose district was carved up decided to challenge the incumbent in this district, the 4th congressional district of Rockland.

The 4th has the largest African-American population in the state - almost 30%. This includes some economically depressed communities, as well as a number of middle-class African-American neighborhoods. The African-American voters are the most consistently Democratic voters in the state. The district also includes some blue-collar areas with large numbers of union workers. The redistricting also brought in some economically well off, socially conservative suburbs. About 70% of the current district was part of the old 4th district; the rest is part of the old 7th district.

The Democratic Incumbent - Regina Flett

Regina Flett was elected to Congress eight years ago after serving in the state legislature for six years. She grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and moved to Rockland after graduating from college. She raised her family and then, just before her 40th birthday, went back to school to get her law degree. While in law school, she became politically active. She worked for the district attorney for five years after law school, then ran for the state assembly and for Congress. She has generally had a safe seat.

Flett describes herself as a liberal pragmatist. As an African-American woman, she naturally can be counted on to play an active role on issues of concern to both women and African-Americans. She is a strong supporter of affirmative action, abortion rights,

and greater social spending on anti-poverty programs. She has also attempted to pass legislation on sexual harassment issues. She believes very strongly that the government needs to invest more money in inner cities, either through greater spending or through targeted tax breaks to companies that create jobs in urban areas.

Flett has had success within Congress working with members who do not share her ideological beliefs. She joined forces with a conservative Republican from her state to get a tax break for a local defense contractor, which saved hundreds of jobs. She has the reputation of being a consensus-seeker who is capable of making a deal. This disappoints some ideologues in her party, but likely makes her more effective in the end.

The Republican Incumbent - Al Sparks

"I'm angry, I'm down, but I'm not out," Al Sparks said the day he announced he would oppose Regina Flett in the redrawn 4th congressional district. Sparks had seen his old district, the 7th, redrawn by the Democratic legislature. Sparks was determined to run again. He chose to run in this district because his home is located here, and because this district offers the best chance for a Republican among the three districts that hold a piece of his old district.

Sparks has one critical problem to overcome. Despite his fourteen years in Congress, it is almost as if he needs to start completely over. Over two-thirds of this district is unfamiliar territory to him. He consequently has had to spend much time here in the last few months building relationships with his new constituents. Since his old district was almost 100% white, white-collar and suburban, he also has had to work harder at familiarizing himself with issues of greatest concern to African-Americans and union workers.

Sparks was popular in his old district. He supported conservative economic and social policies - low taxes and spending, anti-abortion, pro-business, etc. This formula worked well in the old district, as he was able to secure reelection by safe margins. But, given his age (he is now 67), the Democrats chose his district as the one to carve up since they thought he might retire. Sparks surprised many by sticking around for the fight.

Sparks expects to hold his old constituents fairly easily. But to win, Sparks knows that he will need to secure votes from the part of the district Flett has represented. He intends to do this by concentrating on the religiosity of African-American voters. Sparks suspects that churchgoing African-Americans are not completely against a socially conservative agenda on issues such as school prayer and abortion. He is counting on this, coupled with his reputation as a fair and consensus-seeking legislator, to give him a shot at winning.

The Analysts

Political analyst Mary Insightful describes the race as follows: This is an old-fashioned turf war, and Regina Flett controls the turf. She has a tremendous advantage in terms of

name recognition in this new district, and must be favored given the large percentage of union and African-American voters in the district. But, she's never had a challenge like this before. She's never had to deal with a strong challenger like Sparks. He's a proven vote-getter, and the social conservatives who support him tend to turn out at higher numbers. If the turnout numbers favor Sparks, he has a chance. Leans Democrat.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: If you want to use the case study as a handout for students but do not want them to see the consultants' evaluations, simply print the entire case study and mask what follows when photocopying it, "How to Teach this Case."

Democratic Party consultant Barry Simon has offered the following advice to the Flett campaign: It is certainly scary to imagine an election where your opponent is a distinguished, long-serving incumbent from the other party. That would cause me to lose sleep. But, upon further inspection, we need to remember that Flett has represented more of this district. Sparks has a good reputation in Washington, and with his old constituents. But the same can be said for Flett, and her constituents outnumber his by two-to-one. Moreover, I love it when we get to run a Democrat in a district with large numbers of African-American and union voters. This will be a challenge, but we'll win.

Republican Party consultant Adam Newman offers this advice to the Sparks campaign: I admire Al Sparks for running again even after the abomination pulled against him by the Democrats in the legislature. Obviously, the deck seems stacked in Flett's favor here. Sparks has a pro-business record, which will really hurt him with the unions.

And, he is running against an African-American woman, which won't help him with African-American voters. We have two chances, both somewhat long shots. First, we must get much higher turnout among his supporters than among hers. And, we must be able to at least cut into her support among African-Americans with abortion- and religion-based appeals. If we do both of these things...maybe. If not, forget about it.

How to Teach this Case

This case provides an opportunity to teach about redistricting. This sort of partisan redistricting is quite common in states where one party controls the process, as the Democrats do here. Teachers might use this case as an opportunity to address some of the strategic aspects of districting. Note how the Democrats carved one Republican district up to completely eliminate it. Is this fair? This could get a nice discussion going.

Turnout will be important here. Poorer people, less educated people, and younger people turn out to vote less than richer, well-educated, older people do. And, significantly, African-American turnout is lower than white turnout. Flett will thus need to run two campaigns - in addition to getting people to decide to vote for her, she will need to mobilize her supporters to come out and vote on Election Day. This presents a different challenge to her in commercials and speeches.

This campaign also features an African-American woman. It might spark some nice discussions about some of the obstacles women may face in running for higher office. And, African-American voters have certainly faced many obstacles as well. While these obstacles are presumably not central to the case, students may be tempted on their own to create commercials for Flett that use empowerment themes directed at women and minorities. The Sparks team may have to come up with ways to counter this, being sure to avoid any appeals to racist and/or sexist impulses.