

Maverick or Realist?: James Jeffords and the Republican Party

Abstract: In July 2001, James Jeffords choose to leave the Republican Party and become an independent Senator for the state of Vermont. Many news articles were written asserting Jeffords abandoned Republican principles primarily to bring attention to himself within the Senate. This paper argues that Jeffords was not a traitor to his record or ideals, but in fact made his decision based on his perception of how politics had changed in within the National Republican Party. Using the definition of maverickism from Ralph K. Huitt's (1961) work "The Outsider in the Senate: An Alternative Role" we define Jeffords as a realist, who understood successfully representing his constituency meant an inevitable departure from the Republican Party. After establishing the theoretical undertone, we analyze party unity, ADA, and presidential support scores for Jeffords compared with other politicians in Vermont and other members of the Senate who served with Jeffords to illustrate that Jeffords was in fact out of line with the Republican leadership long before he choose to leave the Party. Finally, we argue that in his new role as an independent, and caucusing with the Democratic Party, Jeffords is in a better position to represent his constituents for the future.

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On May 24, 2001 a development started in the 1960s came to fruition inside the Radisson Hotel in Burlington, Vermont. James Jeffords made the announcement that he was leaving the Republican Party and to become an independent, thus shifting the balance of power in the United States Senate and cementing the more liberal tendencies developing in New Englanders over the last forty years. Jeffords had many personal reasons for switching parties, but none was larger than the pressure he was feeling as a representative of the people of Vermont.

While his decision had broad consequences for governing on the national level, it was a byproduct of representation in Vermont and the Northeast and the changing nature of the electorate. Jeffords no longer felt that being a Republican was the best way to represent the people of Vermont. “Increasingly, I find myself in disagreement with my party. I understand that many people are more conservative than I am, and they form the Republican Party. Given the changing nature of the national party, it has become a struggle for our leaders to deal with me, and for me to deal with them” (Jeffords 2001, 115). These reasons are typical of representatives in Vermont as they often put their constituents ahead of the personal policy goals.

Jeffords’ concept of representation directly impacts his rationale for leaving the Republican Party. Jeffords decision is couched in the changing role of politics in New England. This paper explores whether Jeffords decision to change parties fits Ralph Huitt’s (1961) definition of a maverick or whether the decision reflects the Republican Party changes within New England.

VERMONT POLITICS

Vermonters have always considered themselves to be different from other states. “As America’s *first frontier*, Vermont combined the egalitarianism associated with the nineteenth-century westward movement with the brash ideological radicalism of the late eighteenth century. It was a mix of geographical and intellectual influences not found elsewhere in American development” (Bryan and McClaughry 1989, 28). Vermont developed differently from many other states. Their unique origins foster an independent streak that still invokes a tremendous amount of pride within their population to this day. Vermont began as an independent republic on the periphery of the United States and retains their separationist idealism through today (Morrissey 1981).

Vermont’s social history involves more than the famous historical figures such as Ethan Allen and Presidents Calvin Coolidge and Chester A. Arthur. “Because it has so much natural beauty to protect and preserve, Vermont has been very progressive in terms of legislative innovation, especially in the environmental field. It ranks as one of the pioneers (along with Oregon) in its attempts to wrestle with such challenges as state land-use planning, nondisposable bottle laws, a capital-gains tax on land speculators, and a host of related concerns” (Smallwood 1976, xv). The populace’s policy priorities have encouraged politicians to develop stances that reflect Vermont’s independent nature.

The representative that began the modern progressive movement in Vermont is Congressman Bernie Sanders. While listed in Congress as an Independent, Sanders holds many democratic socialist views (Sanders 1997). Before his election to Congress, he served as mayor of Burlington, Vermont and successfully accomplished reforms few people believed possible. As a Progressive, he convinced both Democrats and

Republicans to support his ideas and changed Burlington from a city with many social and economic problems into a successful city with a revived culture and a new attitude (Soifer 1991; Sanders 1997). After his election to Congress, members of Vermont's progressive coalition were elected to the Board of Alderman in Burlington and another progressive, Peter Clavelle, replaced him as mayor in 1989 (Sanders 1997).

This freethinking and progressive movement has codified as a political norm over the last ten years within Vermont. On October 24, 2002, the *Burlington Free Press* endorsed Bernie Sanders for another term in Congress. In the endorsement, the *Press* said, "To be heard in the U.S. House of Representatives, a small state needs a big voice. Vermont has that with Rep. Bernie Sanders, who has a national reputation for outspoken support of unorthodox ideas. ...In doing so, Bernie Sanders fits firmly into the oldest Vermont political tradition cussed independence" (Burlington Free Press 2002). This endorsement reaffirms the independent and progressive traditions of Vermont politics. Sanders, in Congress since 1990, gained seniority through organizational association with the Democratic Caucus. His freethinking and progressive attitude has become the trademark for Vermont, and James Jeffords appears to be in line with this statewide reformist attitude.

JAMES JEFFORDS

Republican politics in Vermont has a long history of fiscal conservatism infused with moderate positions on social issues. James Jeffords' record in Congress has often reflected this ideology. When he first arrived in 1975 as a member of the House of Representatives, he lived in a camper because of \$40,000 in campaign debt (Christensen 2001, 1243). Yet while he may have been fiscally conservative, Jeffords continuously

supported the National Endowment for the Arts and “was one of the five Republicans who voted against convicting Clinton after his impeachment trial in 1999” (Christensen 2001, 1243).

By 1999, James Jeffords was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the current trends within the Republican Party, even though his family was long standing members (Alter 2001; Jeffords 2001). At that time, Jeffords went on record with his concerns over the GOP’s role in the impeachment of President Clinton. By 2001, the issues were different, but his uneasiness with the party remained.

Jeffords’ problems continued with the policy programs advocated by the George W. Bush White House. As a Republican, Jeffords felt that he should support his Party who recently regained control over the White House and both Houses of Congress for the first time in over 40 years. However, he disagreed with the scope and measure of Bush’s tax cuts and had promised his constituents a different plan than the president’s proposal. Jeffords presented his constituents a plan that called for \$2.7 trillion to be set-aside for Social Security and Medicare and another \$1.8 trillion should be split three ways. The first third should be set aside for both the expected and unexpected, the second third should be spent on national priorities such as fully funding special education and providing drug benefits under Medicare, and the final third should be given back to the taxpayers in the form of tax cuts (Jeffords 2001, 36-37). His stance ran counter to the President’s plan, but he believed his idea made the most sense for the people of Vermont and the nation.

The event that finally convinced James Jeffords action was inevitable was the failure of the Republicans to include full funding for special education programs into the FY2002 budget. Jeffords had been advocating for full funding to be included within the

budget, but the Republican leadership would not agree to support this issue. Considering the government had promised to fully fund special education in 1975 and had yet to do so, Jeffords felt increasingly marginalized by the party's leadership. When the budget passed without this measure in place, Jeffords realized not only he no longer fit into the Republican ideological mold, but the current leadership disregarded his seniority and policy expertise (Alter 2001 and Jeffords 2001). The only solution was a dramatic partisan shift to realign Vermont back towards its progressive principles.

Jeffords' decision caught the White House by surprise and shifted the balance of power in the Senate to the Democratic Party. Jeffords' switch was dramatic because of the unprecedented party sharing agreement within an evenly divided Senate. However, while Jeffords switch is significant for Senatorial control, he is not the first senator within American history to change party affiliation.

Table 1 – Senators Who Have Switched Parties

Senator (State)	Switch	Date
Miles Poindexter (WA)	Republican to Progressive	1913
	Progressive to Republican	1915
Robert La Follette Jr. (WI)	Republican to Progressive	1934
	Progressive to Republican	March 17, 1946
George Norris (NE)	Republican to Independent	1936
Henrik Shipstead (MN)	Farmer-Labor to Republican	1940
Wayne Morse (OR)	Republican to Independent	October 24, 1952
	Independent to Democrat	February 17, 1955
Strom Thurmond (SC)	Democrat to Republican	September 16, 1964
Harry Byrd Jr. (VA)	Democrat to Independent	March 17, 1970
Richard Shelby (AL)	Democrat to Republican	November 9, 1994
Ben Nighthorse Campbell (CO)	Democrat to Republican	March 3, 1995
Bob Smith (NH)	Republican to Independent	July 13, 1999
	Independent to Republican	November 1, 1999
James Jeffords (VT)	Republican to Independent	May 24, 2001

(Rudin 2001)

Table 1 shows all of the senators who have switched parties while serving in the Senate.

Jeffords partisan shift is not remarkable considering most have left the Republican Party,

but noteworthy since it is the first to change the leadership structure as a result of such a decision.

Jeffords’ decision to leave the Republican Party reflects the nature of politics in Vermont and the commitment he feels to his constituents. While some believe that the White House lost his loyalty with its conservative stances (Fineman 2001), in reality other factors were pushing Jeffords away from the Republican Party and into step with the more progressive and independent ideas that already existed in Vermont. In fact, Jeffords may have become more popular in Vermont as a result of his independence. Table 2 shows the results of the *Burlington Free Press* poll that was taken the night of his announcement.

Table 2 – Jeffords’ Job Performance¹

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Undecided
September 1992	9 %	44 %	25 %	13 %	9 %
June 1994	14 %	58 %	23 %	3 %	2 %
September 1994	9 %	45 %	32 %	10 %	4 %
September 1996	5 %	47 %	27 %	14 %	3 %
December 1997	12 %	44 %	29 %	14 %	1 %
August 1998	18 %	44 %	28 %	4 %	6 %
May 2001	39 %	31 %	17 %	11 %	1 %

(Burlington Free Press, 2001)

Jeffords’ approval rating has increased from 62 percent rating him as excellent or good in 1998 to 70 percent in 2001. While this difference is not huge, the striking numbers are his approval over time (especially in the excellent category). Jeffords received a tremendous increase in the excellent category after his announcement and enjoyed more support than at any other time in his career.

¹ Mason-Dixon Polling and Research Inc. of Washington, DC, conducted this poll on the evening of May 24, 2001. A total of 552 registered Vermont voters were interviewed statewide by telephone. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

Party unity support scores measure the number of party line votes as determined by Congressional Quarterly where a member supported the party position. Referring to Table 3, James Jeffords' mean support scores are lower than the other Vermont Republicans.

Table 3 – Mean Party Unity Support Scores for Vermont Republicans

Name	Years	Legislative Body	Mean Party Unity Score
James Jeffords	1975-1988	House	37.92
James Jeffords	1989-1998	Senate	43.9
Robert Stafford	1961-1971	House	51.45
Robert Stafford	1971-1988	Senate	43.17
George Aiken	1947-1974	Senate	56.14

(Based on Sharp 1999)

When comparing Jeffords with former Senators George Aiken and Robert Stafford, he was not as strong a supporter of the Republican Party within Congress. From 1975 through 1998, he disagreed with the Republican position on party line votes more often than he agreed with the leadership. As the Republican leadership is increasingly drawn from the South and Midwest, the generally low Party Unity Support Scores for Vermont help explain their philosophical differences in a more formal light.

Another gauge for examining Congressional ideological positions are Americans for Democratic Action Scores (ADA). “ADA assigns each member a ‘liberal quotient,’ which is defined as ‘the percentage of votes cast or paired live, in support of liberal policy, measured against the number of votes counted.’ The issues upon which these ratings are based are selected by a committee of ADA members and ‘cover a gamut of judicial, social, economic, foreign, and military policy. Votes selected display a sharp liberal/conservative divisions unblurred by extraneous matters’” (Sharpe 1999, ix). ADA scores have been calculated since 1947 and serve as a stable and uniform measure for both liberal and conservative tendencies among members of Congress. The scale runs from 0 to 100 with 0 being the most conservative and 100 being the most liberal.

Adding up the ADA scores for the Vermont delegation starting with George Aiken in 1947 illustrates how Jeffords ideology lines up with previous and current Democrats and Republicans who have served their state in Congress. Table 4 reports these scores and suggests Jeffords is in line ideologically with other current and previous members of the Vermont delegation. More important, over time the Vermont delegation's ADA scores have grown increasingly larger. This trend suggests Vermonters are perhaps growing more liberal. The data indicates their representatives and senators are casting votes reflecting growing progressive political leanings and these positions are drawn out through their ADA rankings.

Table 4 – Mean ADA Scores for the Vermont Delegation: 1947-1998

Name	Party	Years	Legislative Body	ADA Score
James Jeffords	R	1975-1988	House	62.2
James Jeffords	R	1989-1998	Senate	59.2
Robert Stafford	R	1961-1971	House	35.36
Robert Stafford	R	1971-1988	Senate	56.3
George Aiken	R	1947-1974	Senate	50.0
Patrick Leahy	D	1974-1998	Senate	89.38
Peter Smith	R	1988-1989	House	57.5
Bernie Sanders	I	1990-1998	House	98.13

(Based on Sharpe 1999).

The mean ADA scores in Table 4 illustrate that over his career Senator Jeffords has been more liberal than all Republican members of the Vermont delegation. While Jeffords is not nearly as liberal as Senator Leahy and Congressman Sanders, he definitely does not reflect previous Republicans. Jeffords' scores in combination with those of Leahy and Sanders points to a larger trend in Vermont politicians and signals a significant difference between Republicans in Vermont and those in the rest of the nation.

SECTIONALISM

Politics in Vermont has been changing at the same time the nation has been changing. Jeffords was experiencing many of the same forces that other members of the Senate feel, but his problem was his constituents became more independent while his party became more conservative. Sectionalism refers to the concept of that the United States exists separate components rather than a cohesive whole. Incompatible political goals often accompany sectionalism and place stress upon the unified system. Within many political systems, “sectional stress remains associated with ethnic identity and religious rivalry” (Bensel 1984, 3). However, Richard Bensel contends American sectionalism has been couched in economic competition (Bensel 1984, 4). Regions compete over financial resources that will support their portion of the overall economy. Sectional stress is political conflict over significant decisions in which a nation is divided into two or more regions, each of which is internally cohesive and externally opposed to the other(s) (Bensel 1984, 3).

Progressivism swept the regions of the country in the late 19th and early 20th century. Progressive ideology hinged upon returning governmental management to the people. Adherents to the movement often advocated a stronger ‘direct democracy’ with less manipulation and more participation. While the movement ultimately lost national appeal, elements of its fundamental ideals embedded themselves into certain ‘regional consciousness.’ In the 1996 presidential election, Bill Clinton easily carried the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast. These regions were the ones with the strongest Progressive roots. However, in the Southern, border, Farmbelt and Rocky Mountain states, President Clinton won a smaller percentage of the vote in these historically conservative regions.

Overall, in 1996, Democrats held stronger in the ‘Progressive Belt’ while losing ground in the ‘Conservative Belt.’

“The new sectionalism is really a return to the cultural politics that dominated the country before the 1930s. The Progressive Belt includes more diverse and socially moderate states of the North and West Coast. The Conservative Belt includes states with culturally conservative traditions on such issues as race and religion” (Schneider 1996, 2723). Aside from realignment and dealignment concerns, what has caused increased partisanship within the country? William Schneider (1996) asserts that as Clinton moved the Democratic Party to the center on economic and social issues, long-standing GOP advantages on these policies were neutralized. In addition, the Democratic Party movement forced the GOP even farther to the right making Republicans “now seem farther out than the Democrats” (Schneider 1996, 2723).

The Northeast has been particularly affected by this sectional shift in partisan politics. “In the Northeast, voters are sending the same kind of moderate Republicans to Congress that they did when Nelson A. Rockefeller was the bane of GOP conservatives in an earlier era” (Salant 1996, 1932). Northeast Republicans unite with their party on fiscal issues, but apparently differ on social ones. For instance, four of the five House Republicans that “voted least often in favor of the GOP’s ‘Contract with America’” came from the Northeast (Salant 1996, 1932). Congresswoman Nancy L. Johnson (R-CT) attributes these differences to regional history. “New England was founded by groups of people wanting to live in communities. Government regulated their lives together... We believe government plays a positive role in our lives” (Salant 1996, 1932).

The North has become increasingly less critical for the GOP in the last 40 years. Southern states have “unpinned Republican presidential victories from Richard M. Nixon in 1968 to George W. Bush in 2000, and the GOP control of Congress that began with the 1994 elections and prevailed until Jeffords’ switch put the Senate into Democratic hands” (Benenson 2001, 1240). These demographic trends are vastly different from a half century ago. During the Truman administration, Republicans controlled 79 of the Northeast’s 123 House seats and 17 of its 22 Senate seats (Benenson 2001, 1240).

Barry Goldwater’s presidential bid was notable for its ability to carry five states in the Deep South. Throughout the Reagan administration, the distance between the Northeastern voters and the national Republican Party grew and culminated with the 1994 elections that brought to power an aggressively conservative, Southern-accented GOP leadership led by House Speaker Newt Gingrich (Connelly and Pitney 1997; Benenson 2001). According to Congressman Peter T. King (R-NY), the Southern controlled Republican Party had “a voice and face that scared off many in the Northeast ... there was a judgmental tone, a harshness” (Benenson 2001, 1241).

In the 105th Congress, led by Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA), the only Northeastern Representative elected to a leadership position was Susan Molinari (R-NY). When she later resigned, she was replaced by a non-Northeasterner. “Many Northeasterners felt alienated, and they grew nervous about embracing a leadership that looked remote and unattractive to their constituents” (Connelly and Pitney 1997). Regional tensions were apparent within the GOP as the leadership favored members from the Sunbelt while often overlooking those from more moderate areas of the nation.

Northeastern attitudes on social issues are distinctly different from the South. Southerners, particularly after 1994, have embedded religiosity and morality into the Republican framework. Northern politicians, like James Jeffords, are uneasy with the new face of the GOP. George W. Bush's election initially gave Northeastern Republicans hope for a more moderate bipartisan government, but as the leadership adopted an aggressive conservative agenda, representatives like Jeffords felt even more alienated than in previous administrations (Christenson 2001, 1242).

OUTSIDER IN THE SENATE

Did James Jeffords decision to change parties make him a realist (insider) or did his actions brand him a maverick (outsider) that may encourage other senators to reevaluate their own political affiliations? White (1956), Mathews (1960), Fenno (1996), and Hatch (2003) all address how members of the Senate must conform to an unwritten code of conduct during their careers. While this code is relaxed for more senior members, conformity is expected from other senators. For example, senators are counted on to agree to unanimous consent agreements and yield the floor to fellow senators at appropriate times. Young members of the Senate rely on more senior members to discover the body's traditional norms and folkways. This process is similar to the apprentice period expected from freshmen members of the House during their first terms (Hibbing 1991).

If senators follow these traditions, they are often perceived by others in a positive light and are accepted as equals within the institution. When senators choose not to follow these folkways and norms, they are often considered to be outsiders and mavericks. To illustrate this scenario, Huitt (1961) conducts an in-depth case study of Senator William Proxmire. In this study of Senator Proxmire, Huitt labels him as a Senate outsider and

defines the role an outsider (or maverick) plays within the Senate. "...the Outsider is notable for his determination to speak out whenever he pleases on whatever subject he chooses without regard to whether he can get any vote but his own" (Huitt 1961, 571).

Today, when senators realize that the ideals of conformity do not fit the ideals of representing their constituents, they can often be labeled as mavericks. This label at one time had a negative connotation, but lately been embraced by some senators, most notably John McCain (McCain and Salter 2002). While mavericks may be acceptable in the Senate today, originally the definition was constructed to negatively label members of the Senate who would not cooperate and did not fit the traditional mold of a senator.

Both the popular press and Washington insiders have labeled Senator Jeffords a maverick as well as an outsider. While it is true that Jeffords has often followed his convictions and gone against the norms of the Senate, his decision to leave the Republican Party was not designed to change the balance of power in the Senate. Senator Jeffords has not been the traditional Republican legislator since the beginning of his career. As the Republican Party has become more conservative over the years, the differences between the median party member and Jeffords positions has grown considerably.

METHODS

How has James Jeffords behaved in the Senate during his tenure? Was his defection from the Republican Party reactionary, or the end product of a long cumulative partisan shift? Clearly, data analysis into his Senatorial behavior is required. In this study, we specifically examine Presidential Support Scores (PSS), Presidential Opposition Scores (PSO), Americans for Democratic Action Scores (ADA), and Party Unity Support Scores (PUS). We have decided these three different methods of examining James Jeffords record

in the Senate are relevant. First, Presidential Support Scores (PSS) and Presidential Opposition Scores (PSO) show how often members of Congress support or oppose the president. By exploring the entire period of Jeffords' service in the Senate (1989-1998),² we should be able to see how his support and opposition compares to other representatives. Generally speaking, Republican senators should show higher presidential support from 1989-1992 (George H. Bush's administration) and lower support from 1993-1998 (Bill Clinton's administration). Second, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scores should illuminate more liberal tendencies among senators as well as between geographic regions within the United States. Finally, Party Unity Support scores (PUS) show the general support members of Congress exhibit towards their own party. It is expected for Republicans and Democrats to display relatively strong levels of partisan support.

We contend the Northeast displays evidence of behaving differently from the rest of the country's Republican Party. We divide the country into four regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)³ and sort the senators by regional and party affiliation. In addition, we also want to look at Jeffords' behavior when compared to other senators over the same period of time. Unfortunately, if we graphically displayed the record of the entire Senate from 1989-1998, the information would be chaotic and impossible to decipher. Instead, we settle upon presenting the records of key senators during this period. Primarily, we select senators who served in leadership positions during the 1989-1998 time frame. In addition, we also selected John McCain and John Chafee to be included within this information. As previously noted, Senator McCain has often been referred to as and

² 1998 was the final year for which all the data was available.

³ Northeast: CT, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT; Midwest: IA, IL, IN, KY, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, OK, SD, WI, WV; South: AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA; West: AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, VT, WA, WY.

occasionally embraced the moniker of maverick. Senator Chafee was also a liberal Republican (though from Rhode Island) whose political beliefs were also considered different from the Party. An examination of Senator Chafee may help support the contention that some Northeastern Republicans are somewhat different from the remainder of the Party and Jeffords was not behaving out of character for his region.

DATA

Presidential Support and Presidential Opposition Scores

Republican senators should show greater support for Republican presidents while demonstrating lower support for Democratic presidents. The reverse should hold true for the Democratic senators.

Table 5- Mean Presidential Support Score and Presidential Opposition Score by Region, 1989-1998

	James Jeffords	Northeast Republicans	Midwest Republicans	Southern Republicans	Western Republicans	Northeast Democrats	Midwest Democrats	Southern Democrats	Western Democrats
PSS Bush (1989-1992)	54.5	68.88	77.45	81.45	77.46	34.52	36.32	50.08	40.41
PSO, Bush (1989-1992)	41.75	29.63	20.54	15.85	18.59	63.70	61.4	46.99	54.06
PSS, Clinton (1993-1998)	63.17	50.39	43.46	36.82	38.90	87.12	85.30	79.84	84.70
PSO, Clinton (1993-1998)	34.83	47.47	56.70	60.12	58.52	10.54	12.38	17.92	12.86

Throughout the regions, the general trend of Republicans supporting a Republican presidential administration holds true. However, the Northeast clearly shows some tendencies unlike other areas of the country. According to Table 4, Northeast Republicans exhibit a lower mean PSS than other areas of the country during the 1989-1992 time period. In addition, the Northeast Republicans also have a higher PSS from 1993-1998 than other areas. The only other remarkable tendency involves the Southern Democrats. From 1989-1992, the Southern Democrats have a PSS score of 50.08. They display a

significantly higher amount of support for a Republican president than any other region within the country.

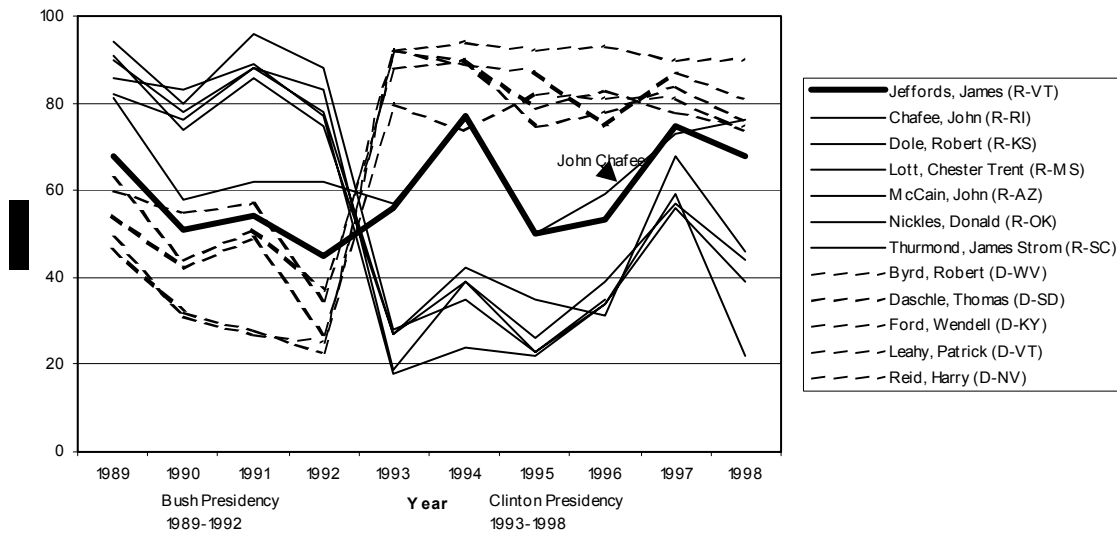
James Jeffords' PSS and PSO mean scores are also different from the general trends among the Northeast Republicans, as well as the rest of the senators when they are groups within regions. Jeffords' PSS score from 1989-1992 is a 54.5. His mean support score is considerably lower than any other Republican-derived region, and is only comparable to the Southern Democratic PSS for the Bush administration. His opposition score (41.75) is also higher than any Republican region.

Jeffords' behavior during the Clinton administration defies our common perception of partisan representatives within the Congress. Jeffords' support score for Clinton (63.17) is actually higher than his support score for Bush (54.5). Furthermore, his opposition score under the Clinton administration (34.83) was significantly lower than his opposition score under Bush (41.75). Though Jeffords was a Republican, his mean support scores actually suggest he was generally more supportive of a Democratic president rather than a Republican one.

To avoid from inadvertent deception from the use of means (outliers offsetting information), we selected the PSS scores from key senators from both parties⁴ and plotted them by year to show the unique nature of James Jeffords' support scores

⁴ James Jeffords, John Chafee, Robert Dole, Trent Lott, John McCain, Don Nickles, Strom Thurmond, Robert Byrd, Tom Daschle, Wendell Ford, Patrick Leahy, Harry Reid

Figure 1. Presidential Support Score (PSS) of Selected Senators, 1989-1998



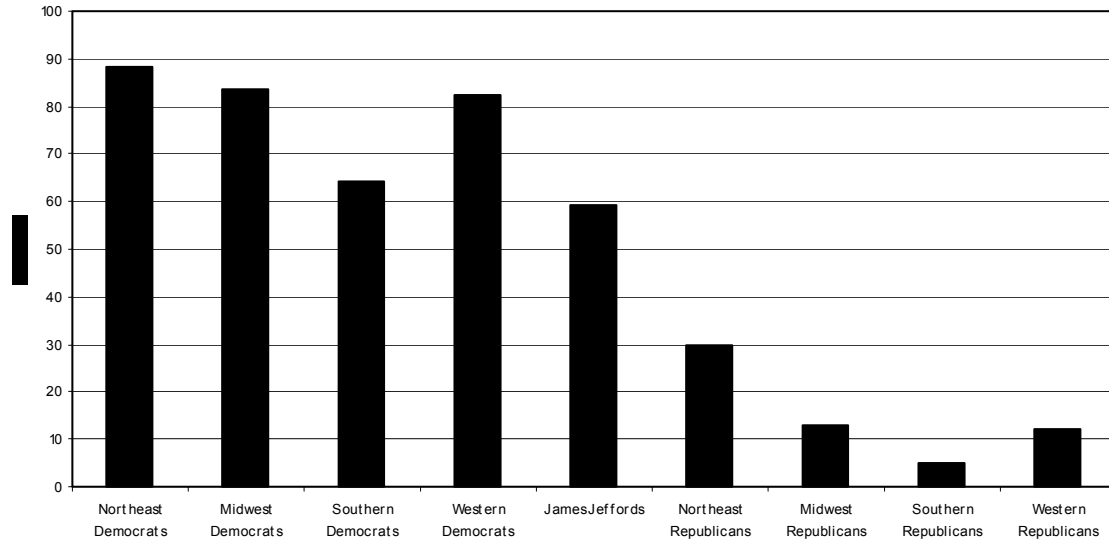
As Figure 1 indicates, Republican senators display higher support for Bush than Clinton. In fact, for the majority of these senators, their support essentially flipped with the change of party within the White House. In fact, only two senators in this example demonstrate behavior contrary to their party norm: James Jeffords and John Chafee.⁵ Jeffords and Chafee’s support scores consistently falls in between Republicans and Democrats. Their individual support scores from 1989-1998 imply their support of a presidential administration was not perhaps a solely partisan decision.

Americans for Democratic Action Scores (ADA)

American for Democratic Action ratings assign a ‘liberal quotient’ to the voting record for each individual senator. It should be logical to assume Democratic senators have significantly higher ADA rating than Republican senators. We contend that some Northeast Republican senators are qualitatively different from other regions. Northeastern Republicans have a tendency to be more socially liberal than the counterparts from other

regions. By looking at the ADA scores by region, we can more thoroughly explore our argument.

Figure 2. Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) Mean Score by Region, 1989-1998



The regional ADA mean scores suggest our contention has some validity.

Democrats express significantly higher ADA regional mean ratings over their Republican counterparts. However, the Northeast Republicans demonstrate a far higher ADA mean score (29.67) than any other region.⁶ By comparing James Jeffords' individual ADA record (59.2) from 1989-1998, we see he scores considerably higher than the average score of Republicans from any region. In fact, the only score his compares to is the mean score for the Southern Democrats (and theirs is the lowest Democratic rating). From 1989-1998, James Jeffords establishes a far more liberal ADA score than what would be expected from a Republican.

⁵ John Chafee was clearly marked on the graph to avoid confusion.

⁶ ADA Mean Scores: Republicans: NE- 29.67, MW- 13.23, S- 5.06, W- 12.38; Democrats: NE-88.06, MW- 83.71, S-64.42, W-82.54

Figure 3. Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) Scores for Selected Senators, 1989-1998

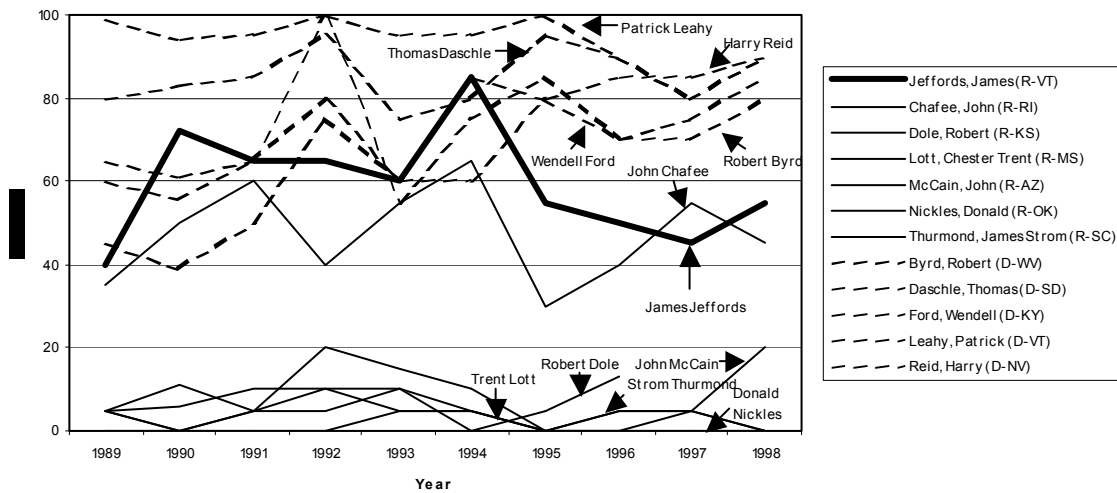


Figure 3 further clarifies Jeffords’ distinction among his fellow senators within his ADA scores. The majority of the selected Republican senators (with John Chafee as an exception) maintain extremely low (20 or lower) ADA scores between 1989 and 1998. Considering this score determines the ‘liberalness’ of a senator, these scores are not surprising. However, James Jeffords’ record has consistently been considerably higher than other the other selected Republicans. In fact, his rating at times has been higher than some of the selected Democrats within this study. James Jeffords has retained a consistent rating, but it does defy what would be considered a typical Republican score. From 1989 through 1998, ADA has shown Jeffords’ record has been generally more liberal than others within the Republican Party. While the Northeast Republicans maintain a higher mean ADA score than others, Jeffords personal ADA rating suggests he falls into a liberal category for a Republican.

Party Unity Support Scores (PUS)

As previously stated, party unity support scores measure the number of party line votes as determined by Congressional Quarterly where a member supported the party position. Generally, both Republican and Democratic senators maintain fairly high PUS scores. These scores reveal how often a senator votes with their individual party. In addition, the PUS score may also imply the level of control a party can exert over its members on party line votes.

Figure 4. Party Unity Support (PUS) Mean Scores by Region, 1989-1998

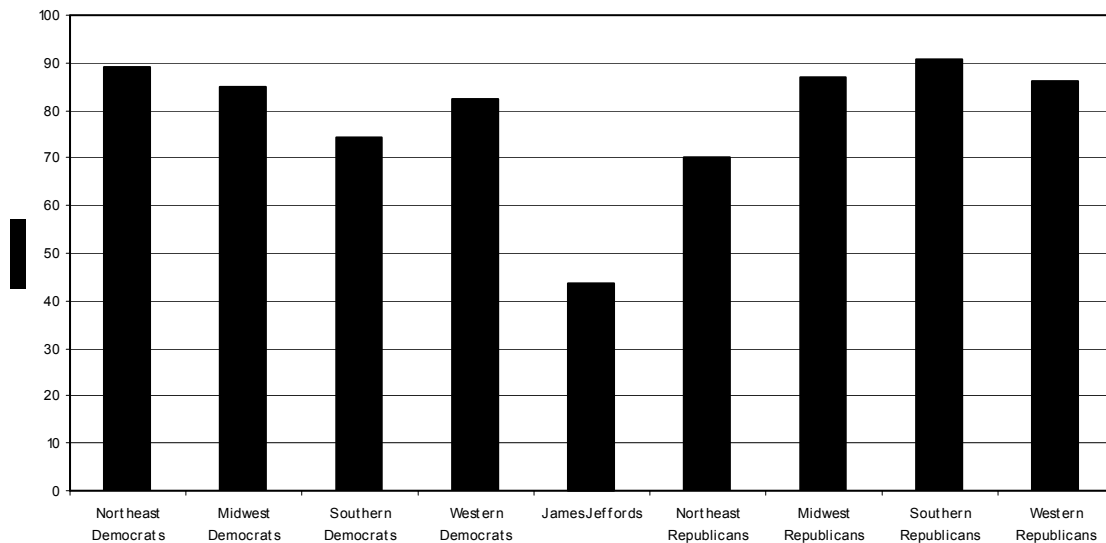
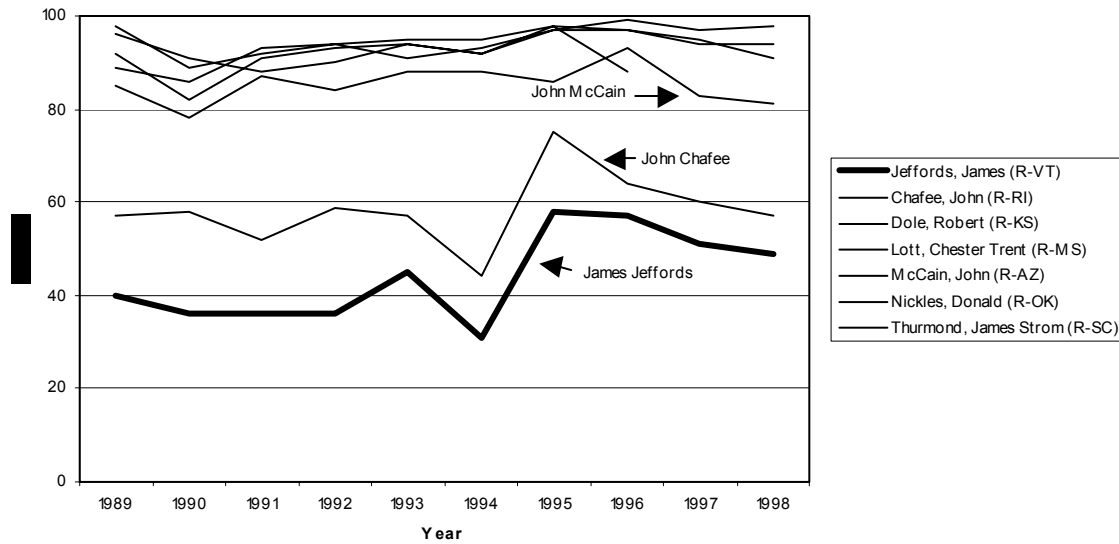


Figure 4 shows the PUS mean regional scores⁷ are at approximately 70 or higher for every region, Democrat or Republican. In fact, the lowest score comes from the Northeast Republicans with a PUS mean from 1989-1998 at 70.09 and the highest from the Southern Republicans (90.76). The Northeast Democrats exhibit the second highest mean PUS score at 89.18. In contrast, James Jeffords' PUS score breaks with the general trend of Republican Party unity support. From 1989-1998, Jeffords PUS score is only a 43.9.

Figure 5. Party Unity Support Scores for Selected Republican Senators, 1989-1998



When Jeffords is compared over time with the other selected Republicans, he consistently demonstrates an extremely low PUS rating. This finding suggests Jeffords perhaps voted for reasons other than party unity support.

Figure 5 displays selected Republican PUS scores from 1989-1998.⁸ The majority of Republicans show a high level of party support. Even John McCain, often considered a maverick, expresses a high level of party unity and appears not to be out of step with his party. However, the ratings do suggest Jeffords' PUS is far lower than the general trend among Republican senators. However, figure 5 also implies Jeffords was not incapable of party support. In fact, from 1995-1998, Jeffords' shows higher party unity support than from 1989-1994. This information runs contrary to the perception James Jeffords was looking for an excuse to switch party affiliation. If this contention were true, one would expect to find their unity support to wane over time. Instead, Jeffords support seems to

⁷ PUS Mean Scores: Republicans: NW-70.09, MW-87.04, S- 90.76, W-86.29; Democrats: NW-89.18, MW-84.80, S-74.28, W-82.11

increase during the mid to late 1990s. This finding lends credence to the idea James Jeffords truly wanted to remain in the Republican Party, and was not just looking for an opening to leave.

CONCLUSION

James Jeffords seems to have identified with the concerns of the Vermont electorate and shaped his service to reflect theirs, not the national Republican Party's needs, within that state. Through an examination of PSS, PSO, ADA, and PUS scores, the Northeast Republicans appear to be more supportive of liberal policies than Republicans from other regions of the country. While many members of the Republican Party commonly hold certain ideals throughout the nation, critical regional differences clearly exist. James Jeffords and John Chafee perhaps reflect the most liberal diversity within the Republican Party. Jeffords switch to an independent party affiliation makes more sense when one examines his PSS, PSO, and ADA ratings from 1989-1998. While the Northeast exhibits greater liberal characteristics than the rest of the country, Jeffords' positions were even more liberal. However, his record does not suggest he was a Democrat either. Jeffords PSS and ADA ratings were still more conservative than the majority of Democratic senators examined within this paper. In this light, Jeffords simply did not fit into the schema of either party and chose independence over a poorly fitted partisan label.

Jeffords did not come to his decision lightly. It took years of frustration with the Republican leadership over issues important to the people of Vermont for him to make his ultimate decision to leave the party. Ultimately his decision to leave the Republican Party did turn control of the Senate over to the Democrats, but such a subversive goal was never

⁸ In Figure 5, Jeffords, McCain and Chafee are highlighted, but the other Republicans do not exhibit unusual characteristics and thus were not individually labeled.

Jeffords' aim. The timing of the decision perhaps labeled him a maverick, but his record proves otherwise. Jeffords has maintained a consistent PSS, PSO, and ADA record throughout his Senatorial career. Ultimately, Jeffords' shift derives from a cumulative record of incompatibility with the general Republican positions. While events within the George W. Bush administration may have acted as a catalyst, scholars examining Jeffords' record cannot solely attribute his actions as a reactionary move resulting from friction between the White House and Jeffords. James Jeffords' move to an independent platform finally placed him more in line with his record, neither wholly Republican nor Democrat.

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