

Congress members in place for roll call votes

While members of Congress incurred criticism for many of their official actions and personal escapades during 1989, one thing they did very well was attend roll calls on the House and Senate floors.

Truants at taxpayer's expense were hard to find in either body during the first year of the 101st Congress.

The average House member took part in 94 percent of the 368 roll calls conducted during the 11-month legislative session, and senators on average voted on 58 percent of their

chamber's 312 record votes.

Just 33 House members and one senator scored below 90 percent.

The high turnout that (mug-mind) members put on good attendance and the fact that most roll calls are scheduled to avoid conflict with lawmakers' travel plans.

House and Senate percentages have hovered in the low to mid-90s throughout this decade, and only in 1982, when the House registered 89 percent, did either chamber fail to reach 90 percent.

Members believe high absenteeism from roll calls is politically harmful, particularly when an aggressive challenger converts the truancy into a campaign issue easily comprehended by voters back home. But there is no widely held view that high attendance translates automatically into excellence in other congressional tasks.

REPRESENTATIVES LIKE William Natcher, D-Ky., who has never missed a floor vote in 35 years in the House, and Charles Bennett, D-Fla., who has missed just one quorum call since 1951, are rated by colleagues as effective legislators, as are many other members with sparkling attendance.

But the fact that many unexceptional lawmakers also have high attendance bolsters the view that merely showing up to vote has little bearing on overall competence.

"Voting participation is not a good indicator of anything other than someone's determination not to miss votes," said Thomas Mann, a Congress-watcher for the Brookings Institution.

"Standing alone, it doesn't mean that much," said Heritage Foundation congressional specialist Mark Liedt, "because it is not that difficult to

show up for all the votes. What is more interesting is looking at votes members miss and why they miss them."

The 1989 voting attendance survey by Roll Call Report Syndicate is based on all congressional roll calls other than quorum calls. Members had to cast a yea or nay to be counted as voting.

Perfect attendance in the 435-seat House was recorded by Republicans Larry Combest of Texas, Timothy Penny of Minnesota, Thomas Petri of Wisconsin and Christopher Shays of Connecticut, and Democrats Jim Jontz of Indiana, Dale Kildee of Michigan, Tom McMillen of Maryland,

Roll Call Report

Harold Volkmer of Missouri and Bennett and Natcher.

The worst House truancy was registered by New Jersey lawmakers Jim Florio, a Democrat who missed 80 percent of the chamber's roll calls, and Jim Courter, a Republican who missed 75 percent. Both campaigned most of the year for governor of the state. Florio won.

Aide John Steel said Florio "was always here for the important votes"

such as on abortion and the minimum wage. Courter spokesman Matt Behrmann said his boss also showed up for key votes, adding "the responsibilities of a congressman go far beyond what goes on in the floor."

Eighteen of the 100 senators registered perfect attendance. Spark Matsunaga, D-Hawaii, in bad health, was the only senator scoring below 90 percent. He voted 63 percent of the time.

Levins lead area reps in attendance

Percentage shows how often members voted yea or nay on 368 House roll call votes and 312 Senate roll call votes that were conducted during 1989. Perfect attendance is 100 percent.

U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth — 94 percent.
U.S. Rep. Dennis Hertel, D-Harper Woods — 93 percent.

U.S. Rep. William Ford, D-Taylor — 94 percent.

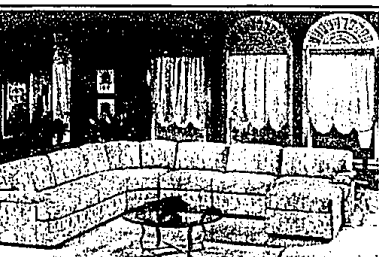
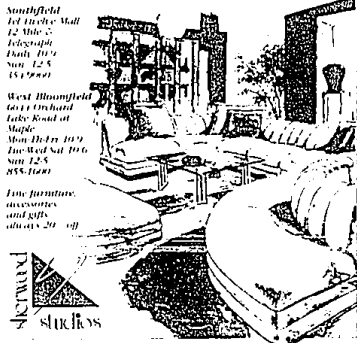
U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-Southfield — 100 percent.
U.S. Rep. William Broomfield, R-Birmingham — 94 percent.

U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D. — 99 percent.

U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle, D — 96 percent.

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Individuals who must take the Personal Assessment Inventory required for entry into the Legal Assistant Program offered by the Division of Continuing Education at Oakland University may register now for the Jan. 9 tests.

The tests, which measure skills

and levels of abstract reasoning, will be held from 7:30-9:30 p.m. in the Oakland center on the Rochester campus. Prepayment of \$25 is required.

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