

Roll Call Report

Members of the 1991 session of Congress were faulted for almost everything from worsening the recession to bouncing their personal checks at the House bank.

But whatever they did right or wrong during the 11-month legislative term, they cannot be accused of avoiding roll call votes on the House and Senate floors.

Once again in 1991, the great majority of lawmakers registered high attendance at record votes conducted in the two chambers, according to a survey by Roll Call Report Syndicate.

This includes Michigan's senators and House members from the Observer & Eccentric area.

In the House, where 428 roll calls were held, the average member's voting attendance was 95.1 percent in the Senate, which conducted 280 roll calls, the average was 97.4 percent. Lawmakers had to cast a yes or no to be counted in attendance.

Eight House members and 19 senators recorded 100 percent attendance and overall legislative competence. But they support the notion that incumbents who are excessively truant invite political trouble ranging from newspaper editorials to negative television commercials.

SEN. CARL LEVIN, D-Mich, was one of those senators with 100 percent voting attendance. Sen. Donald Riegle, D-Mich, was close behind, with 99 percent voting attendance. All of Michigan's U.S. representatives had at least 90 percent attendance.

In the Observer & Eccentric area, Sander Levin, D-Southfield, was highest with 99 percent. Dennis Herold, D-Harper Woods was next with 97 percent. William Broomfield, R-Birmingham, had 96 percent; Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, had 92 percent and William Ford, D-Taylor, was lowest of all Michigan's state representatives, posting 90 percent.

The lowest attendance among all House members — 35 percent — was registered by Rep. Larry Hopkins, R-Ky., who spent much of the year back home in a losing campaign for governor of Kentucky.

Rep. Mel Levine, D-Calif., ranked second from the bottom with 60 percent attendance. An undeclared candidate in the 1992 U.S. Senate race in California, he attributed most of his misses to the demands of getting his campaign under way.

Voting absenteeism was an issue in the 1990 California race for governor. Republican Pete Wilson, then a U.S. senator, caught so much flak for missing votes that he left the campaign trail only weeks before election day to return to Capitol Hill.

Levin's aides sought to downplay their boss's absenteeism. "He's had excellent attendance" throughout his 10-year House career, said a spokesman. "Mel's been asked this question before, and one of his responses always is that he never misses votes that are close."

Ranking third from the bottom, with 64 percent attendance, was Rep. Robert J. Mrazek, D-N.Y., whose misses also resulted mainly from getting an early start on a 1992 U.S. Senate campaign.

ANOTHER NEW YORK Democrat, freshman Rep. Jose Serrano, acknowledged "politically, there could be a problem" over his 62 percent attendance.

Most of his 53 no-shows occurred when he remained in his South Bronx district to speak at more than two dozen school graduations, "telling the kids to stay in school, stay off drugs, showing them what I've done with my life."

Serrano doesn't feel he missed much on Capitol Hill, because "there are a lot of votes that I wonder why the heck they're being taken."

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