Non-partisan Rating of Congressional Candidates' Governmental Management Ability

Countless societies have learned the hard way that the quality of government depends on the quality of its selected leaders.   Unfortunately, there are clear signs that our current political process is not providing the quality of leaders needed to solve our national and international problems.

A number of rating systems currently exist for members of Congress based on their support of specific issue positions, or political party agendas.   But unfortunately, no non-partisan evaluation system currently exists to objectively rate the quality of a candidate's solution oriented decision making and problem solving potential.   Newspapers used to provide some independent analysis for voters, but newspaper readership has declined dramatically, and many remaining papers have discontinued political endorsements.

Citizens have learned to expect, and use, ratings guides for selecting things such as entertainment, businesses, professional services, and specific products.   Pew Research found over 60% of people check online ratings at least once a week?   Over 40% "always or almost always" check reviews before making decisions.   The use percentages are even higher with Millennial and Gen Z individuals who will probably decide future elections. Citizens should have objective, easy to understand, quality ratings available for one of the most important decisions they make, electing a Congress and President.

Members of Congress are effectively managers, selected and paid by citizens, to provide an efficient governmental infrastructure to solve the nation's common problems in a cost efficient way.   At the Federal level, the Congress is responsible for managing a service delivery organization with a $5.8 Trillion budget and over 1.9 Million civilian employees in hundreds of agencies, plus the armed services.   For tax-payers to get the best performance from these elected "managers", their actual management and problem solving capability and performance should be evaluated prior to each election cycle, just like it would be in private sector organizations.   Recent polls show that only about 20% of voters approve of Congress's overall performance so there is a clear need for something to improve the process.

Unfortunately, the highly partisan political process we use to select the members of Congress, puts very little emphasis on basic management and effective decision making skills.   The process increasingly favors selection based on personality, political partisanship, and "sound bite" issue positions as opposed to evaluating their actual ability for problem solving and consensus building.

To offset this, I want to suggest that your organization take a lead, along with other non-partisan organizations, to collectively develop an objective performance rating system for Congressional office holders and candidates. I have started by working with No Labels which supports the bi-partisan congressional Problem Solvers Caucus.   Having more organizations with a similar interest in good government participate would add credibility to the ratings, although it may add more complexity to the evaluation process.   Potential partner organizations which might be considered include the League of Woman Voters, The Congressional Management Foundation, The Partnership for Public Service, Ballotpedia.org, FixUSNow.org, The Congressional Institute, The National Institute for Civil Discourse, and other non-partisan government affairs organizations.

There will, unfortunately, be differences in the types of data available for incumbents versus new candidates for office. Because of this, the process would need to be broad based and flexible enough to also rate those initially seeking elected positions with appropriate alternative criteria. Evaluation issues, which can't be properly rated for a specific candidate, would also have to be clearly identified. Data for some criteria are available from public records and existing research organizations, such as the National Archives and Congress.gov. Other factors may require a balanced subjective evaluation process. Compiling some data for evaluations will probably also require obtaining structured input from candidates, particularly non-incumbents. Information on their experience and their stated positions on some evaluation criteria will need to be collected. The process should start with candidates for Congress because of the importance of their function. However, once established the process might also be used to evaluate Presidential candidates and possibly key state office candidates.

Collection and processing of candidate data into an easily understandable rating system, and broad distribution of the ratings will require some staff and funding. Member organizations of the consortium should probably establish a separate 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization to collect contributions and do the actual rating work. Candidates could be rated from 0 to 5 on each criterion, along with a total or average rating for comparison. Supporting information should also be provided to explain each rating decision. Sponsor organizations may, at their option, may also want to endorse their preferred candidate for each position, which could be added to the site.

To be effective in improving voter decision making, the ratings would need wide distribution and visibility. Distribution costs could be reduced by having each member organization distribute them to their members, and add links for the ratings website on their own websites. An effective media public relations campaign about the new process and the availability of the ratings on the website should also expand potential voter use. Candidates should be granted permission to advertise their ratings, as long as they include the full name and URL of the ratings site so voters can view all other candidate's ratings.

POTENTIAL RATING CRITERIA

1. Educational Background:

Education experience or self-education experience in areas that may be useful to understanding governmental policy issues, or organizational administration and governmental processes.

2. Prior public sector or private sector organizational management experience:

Previous management or leadership positions in businesses, government, or other organizations, at the local, state, federal, or international level.

3. Demonstrated record of ethics, financial and issue transparency, support of the democratic process:

No known ethics violations or public dishonesty.

Full and open financial reporting of business or financial activity and investments.

Demonstrated support for the democratic process and voter rights protections.

Support of balanced and logical geographic or "common interest" election districting processes and equitable voter representation at the state level.

Support of campaign financing limitations and transparency of third party donation groups.
Clear positions and transparent positions on major issues.

4. Demonstrated problem solving interest and activity:

Level of participation in governmental and non-governmental issue conferences and education forums.

Number and quality of their solution focused publications or public presentations.

Active participation in issue solution focused Congressional caucus groups.

Demonstrated openness to input and alternative ideas from constituents and others.

5. Demonstrated record of bi-partisan solution focused activity:

Percentage of votes they have made in conflict with the majority of their party.

Number or percentage of non-committee bills they have sponsored in the last Congress that have at least 10% sponsorship from members of the other party.

Support of good Congressional information systems and process modernization bills or activity. Support for information systems and research programs at the agency level to inform agency and congressional decision making.

Demonstrated use of objective research in committee discussions, public presentations, and publications.

Professional interpersonal behavior with colleagues and the public.

6. Demonstrated work effort and representation of constituent's interests

Percentage of attendance for chamber votes.

Percentage of committee meeting attendance and participation.

Number of bills developed and sponsored having at least 5 co-sponsors from each party

Number of open public input meetings held within their district or state each year.

Other activity to seek constituent input on issues.

Support of their staff's openness to constituent and public input and bipartisan interaction with other member's staffs.

7. Demonstrated concern for Governmental Fiscal Responsibility

Support of an analytical "cost - benefit" approach for budgeting and appropriations in government *or* in other prior organizations or businesses.

Support of balanced budgeting and the need for expenditure off-setting revenue, except when required for necessary economic stimulus.

Demonstrated concern about the US fiscal debt and maintaining the stability and credibility of the US and international financial system.

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