

Furthermore, a legislator has to vote yes or no on thousands of issues, leaving a long paper trail. This trail is bound to contain more controversial elements than any governor's list of bridges built and budgets balanced. Opponents often distort legislators' records in smear campaigns that make use of attack ads and mudslinging. A vote for a \$300 billion bill can become defined by one tiny provision it contained.

Also, Congress is a major part of "official" Washington, and senators and representatives can hardly say they have no connection with what occurs there. Conversely, governors running for the White House can always claim they are Washington "outsiders" who are going to sweep in and clean up the town. Former governor-turned-president Bill Clinton reportedly advised then-senator Joseph Biden, D-Del., that senators had to overcome big handicaps to run for president. Not only did they have their records to explain, but they also had forgotten how to speak the language of the average person. "When you get to Washington, the only people you talk to are the elites: elites in the press, elites among the lobbyists, elites that you hire on your own staff," Clinton told Biden. "You're

not regularly talking to ordinary, everyday people."<sup>d</sup> Biden didn't listen to Clinton, launching his second bid for the presidency in 2008 and ultimately being elected at Obama's side as vice president. But, then, neither did Clinton's wife, who served as Obama's first secretary of state after losing to him in the 2008 primaries.

Still, the out-of-touch image of Congress and Washington in the public mind hampers members of Congress who seek national office. "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress," Mark Twain wrote in his 1897 book *Following the Equator*. Governors running for national office invariably present themselves as fresh alternatives to the tired habits of Washington, promising to change the culture and tone of the nation's capital.

That they fail to do so is almost a given. That opens up the field for the next fresh face from the state of California or Arkansas or Texas. Within hours of Obama's reelection, attention turned to governors as potential candidates in 2016—particularly among Republicans but also among potential Democratic hopefuls not named Hillary Clinton.

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<sup>d</sup>Larry J. Sabato, "Will a Governor Win the White House in 2016?" *Politico*, February 17, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/02/2016-elections-governor-white-house-103568.html>.

<sup>e</sup>Quoted in Lou Jacobson, "Can Governors Balance National Ambitions With Concerns Back Home?" *Governing*, July 2014, <http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-going-national.html>.

<sup>f</sup>Larry J. Sabato, *Goodbye to Good-Time Charlie: The American Governorship Transformed*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1983), 33.

<sup>g</sup>Quoted in E. J. Dionne Jr., "Govs 4, Senators 0. Tough Odds," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2004, E4.