U.S. SENATORIAL CAMPAIGNS AND LEGISLATIVE PROMISE-KEEPING
ON LGBTQ AND WOMEN’S ISSUES

A dissertation presented

by

Jaclyn Northrup

to
The Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of
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Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
March 2020
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Abstract
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In *The Legislative Legacy of Congressional Campaigns* (2011), Tracy Sulkin found that legislators largely kept the broad promises they made on important issues in their campaigns, with some variation across issues and rhetorical features. Does this finding hold for all types of issues? I assess the promises candidates for U.S. Senate made on their websites regarding women’s issues and LGBTQ issues, as they framed them, including issues of abortion, other women’s health issues, anti-violence efforts, workplace issues, marriage equality, discrimination, and more. I then compared those promises to the legislative actions they took in the following term to determine whether promises were kept.

The focus on less prominent issues calls for a shift in methods, drawing from an inclusive campaign product—websites, rather than one limited by cost—television ads. Using landmark legislation on these topics, five congressional sessions (109th-113th, 2005-2014) were chosen for examination, representing a variety of political climates. A survey of websites of all winning candidates revealed whether and, if so, how candidates made promises on these issues. Records of (co)sponsorship and votes were used to determine whether the promises made were kept in the subsequent term. This study’s findings indicate that, with few exceptions, Senators keep the promises made on these less prominent issues as well.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee chair and members who provided guidance and feedback that made this endeavor possible. They were patient and offered detailed comments when necessary, but also posed challenging questions regarding some of the big picture aims of my work. Additionally, I would like to thank the panelists and discussants who provided feedback on earlier, partial versions of this work at conferences. Though I received and utilized this feedback, any errors that remain are mine and mine alone. I truly would not have been able to make it through the dissertation writing process without my colleagues at The University of Alabama Women and Gender Resource Center who continuously offered perspective and words of encouragement. Finally, my partner and family encouraged me and picked up many added responsibilities to make this possible. For all of this support, I am eternally grateful.

I come to this research as a person who cares deeply about both women’s rights and LGBTQ rights. Before pursuing my PhD, I spent a couple years working in reproductive rights in Mississippi and it is, in part, that work that led me to this question. Tracking legislators’ actions on reproductive rights was part of my work and I was fascinated by the way legislators in a very red, very religious state addressed these issues. I was also fascinated by the way that legislators did not address these issues. There were legislators who voted to support reproductive rights 100 percent of the time, yet had no mention of these issues on their websites and didn’t discuss these issues publicly unless prompted. I wondered how engagement with abortion and other women’s issues varied across the U.S. and I also wondered: were those who are willing to speak up more likely to act on these issues or were they just more free to speak on them? Are the legislators who remain quiet on these issues actually less supportive, or are they just working in
districts that did not want a vocal advocate on these issues? I explore these questions here and understand the prevalence of speech with no action, as well as action without speech. Additionally, I begin to explore the implications of each of these dynamics on legislative outcomes and representation.

My investment in women’s rights and LGBTQ rights should not, however, have a negative impact on my research because the questions I investigate primarily explore candidate-legislator consistency. If a researcher who opposed LGBTQ rights and women’s rights were to examine the data, they should come to the same conclusions.

The data I collected will be stored in a secure Box account at The University of Alabama where I am employed and will be made available upon request via e-mailing my Northeastern University e-mail address: Northrup.J@husky.neu.edu.
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Abbreviations, Tables, and Figures

LGBTQ   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
FRC     Family Research Council
AAUW    The American Association of University Women
HRC     The Human Rights Campaign

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Representation is one of the most fundamental principles of American Government. While there are an array of models of representation and thoughts about a representative’s role, the underlying assumption is that citizens will select representatives who will make decisions in their best interests and in the best interests of the entire country. Though the U.S. government was formed in a time and space of limited input from women and LGBTQ individuals, the basic assumption stands that their interests, too, ought to be considered and their rights upheld. History, however, clearly demonstrates that women and LGBTQ people have had to (and in some instances, continue to) fight for basic rights and equal treatment under the law. While progress toward equality is evident, what does that commitment look like among modern Senators? Are they taking up issues that are important to women and LGBTQ constituents? When they take up these issues, do they pursue them consistently and diligently? This study focuses on Congresses from 2005-2014 based on the large number of landmark legislative actions on these topics. The varied partisan dynamics over the period also make the period ripe for study.

During this period, representation of women steadily but slowly increased, with the number of women in the Senate growing from 14 to 20 and the number of women in Congress overall rising from 82 to 100 (CAWP). To this day, however, less than 20 percent of Congress is made up of women and only one percent are openly LGBTQ, though women and openly LGBTQ people compose, respectively, 50 percent and approximately 3 percent of the U.S. population. Recent studies have shown that 14-20 percent of millennials identify as LGBTQ, indicating that a sharp increase in LGBTQ identified voters may be possible in the coming years (Cohen, et al.; GLAAD).
Jane Mansbridge (2005) argues that descriptive representation is critical for groups whose members “respond to group-relevant issues with greater concern than nonmembers” and when shared identities foster better communication between constituents and representatives (p. 624). Studies have shown that LGBTQ representation is “more than descriptive”, it is “important for achieving policy goals”, and the net effect of LGBTQ political representation is positive legislative outcomes for the LGBT community” though there is also evidence of some backlash or “an increase in antigroup legislation” (Haider-Markel, 2010, p. 130).

When women and the LGBTQ community are persistently underrepresented descriptively, is it possible to be certain that they have substantive representation? When our modern representatives, independent of identity, make promises on issues that impact women and LGBTQ individuals, is it possible to be certain they will follow through on those promises? Do findings in the broader promise-keeping literature hold true for these specific moral issue areas? These, and other critical questions of representation will be explored.

By identifying issues that impact women and LGBTQ individuals, tracking and examining what promises candidates make on those issues, and comparing their promises to the actions they took in the following term, initial evaluations can be made of candidate/legislator promise-keeping in these areas. Promise-keeping is of particular interest as it relates to women’s and LGBTQ issues based on the historic and ongoing marginalization of these individuals and groups. When representatives from these groups are either not in the Senate or are present in small numbers, members of the dominant groups are responsible for representing their interests. These particular sets of issues are often considered “moral” issues, and thus elicit strong feelings and opinions on both sides. For individuals who are not personally invested in these issues, these promises may be easy to defect on. Drawing upon Tracy Sulkin’s findings in The Legislative
Legacy of Congressional Campaigns (2011), I have assessed how candidates’ positions on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues compare to their actions in the following term.

**Background**

**Women’s and LGBTQ Issues as Moral Issues**

What are moral issues? Is there such a thing? Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen (2012) define moral issues as “fundamental decisions related to death, marriage and reproduction (p. 24). Under this definition, marriage equality, abortion, and other reproductive health issues, at the very least, would qualify as moral issues. What about other LGBTQ and women’s issues? A broader definition from Mooney (2001) indicates that an issue qualifies as moral if related advocacy coalitions define the issue as “threatening one of its core values, its first principles” (p. 4). Using this broader definition, all LGBTQ and women’s issues would qualify based on advocacy coalitions’ use of an equality framework. Yet another way to define moral issues is to examine psychological responses of voters. Using this lens, morality varies from person to person and community to community, but same-sex marriage and abortion consistently correspond to high moral or deontological responses (Ryan, 2014). Using these three standards, the most common LGBTQ and women’s issues, if not all LGBTQ and women’s issues, qualify as moral issues.

However, there are scholars who advocate for a different approach to morality policy. Rather than defining issues as moral substantively or categorically, some argue that moral framing is what should be of interest. Using this approach, any issue could be addressed through a lens of morality, if the framer of an argument is concerned with deontology over other forms of reasoning (Mucciaroni, 2011). Mucciaroni (2011) argues that abortion, for instance, could be addressed with “fully framed morality policies” if both sides use deontological reasoning or it
could be addressed with “fully framed instrumental policies” if both sides make arguments about policy consequences unrelated to what is “right” or “wrong” (p. 193). This study will consider moral framing while also proceeding to treat LGBTQ and women’s issues themselves as substantively and categorically moral.

There are several ways in which moral issues should be of particular interest to political candidates. Though partisan identification remains a primary predictor of vote choice, there is a subset of voters who are particularly concerned with policy issues, and a subset of those issue voters are concerned with moral issues in particular. One piece of evidence of concern regarding moral issues is that when ballot initiatives address moral issues during midterm elections, voter turnout increases (Grummel, 2008). Similarly, while the electorate is generally split on the issue of abortion, a 2012 poll of registered voters in swing states revealed that 38 percent of women respondents thought abortion was the most important issue for women in that election (Dugan, 2012). The issue of abortion remains fairly evenly contested and is somewhat salient for a portion of the electorate.

Two of the most prominent issues under the women’s and LGBTQ issues umbrellas are abortion and marriage equality, respectively. These two issues meet Carmine and Stimson’s three requisites for easy issues: (1) they are symbolic rather than technical, (2) they deal with policy ends rather than means, and (3) they have long been on political agendas (Carmines and Stimson, 1980, p. 80). This is of note because easy issues provide a shortcut for less-informed voters, similar to party identification. The “ease” of these issues, coupled with their strong ties to party policy positions, suggests that voters can quickly evaluate candidates on these issues and determine whether they intend to offer their support.

Some issues under the LGBTQ and women’s issues umbrellas may be “hard issues”, but
they are certainly less represented in candidate promises and public discourse than abortion and marriage equality during the period studied, thus requiring greater voter sophistication and dedication. One available shortcut to assist voters who are concerned with more complex women’s and LGBTQ issues is endorsements. There are organizations that address a multitude of women’s and/or LGBTQ issues that assist voters by publishing voter guides, reducing the work required to explore candidate positions and records independently. Based on these considerations, electoral pressures may motivate candidates to take positions or act on these issues, even if they are not personally affected.

**Narrowing in on Promise-keeping on Women’s and LGBTQ Issues**

Tracy Sulkin’s *The Legislative Legacy of Congressional Campaigns* (2011) examines promise-keeping using an agenda focus. Sulkin (2011) examined candidate television ads to see which issues candidates discussed and what percentage of their time they spent on each issue. She justified this as a measure of their agenda priorities because television ads are costly and short, so only high-priority issues would have been given much time. Then, Sulkin (2011) looked at elected officials’ legislative agendas to see how many of the bills that they sponsored or co-sponsored were on the topics that consumed agenda space in their previous campaign. According to Sulkin (2011), if an issue is important to a legislator, they would spend time on it during the campaign and then follow through on it once in office.

Sulkin’s (2011) analysis was not limited to any particular campaign issues. Instead, she followed the guidance from the Policy Agendas Project and the Wisconsin Advertising Project and condensed all issues into 18 exhaustive and mutually exclusive issue categories (Sulkin, 2011, p. 47). This means that she did include issues impacting women and LGBTQ-identified individuals, but she condensed them into broader categories. For instance, abortion and gay
marriage were both categorized as “moral issues”. There are, of course, many issues relevant to
LGBTQ individuals and to women beyond abortion and gay marriage, but different issues may
have collapsed into different categories, so these areas could not be independently examined
through Sulkin’s published work.

An initial challenge in looking at promise-keeping on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues
exclusively is that the agenda-based design would likely show that these do not take up a great
deal of candidate or legislator time or effort. These issues are less prominent in comparison to
broader topics such as education, defense, the economy, etc. As a result, women’s issues and
LGBTQ issues only consume a small fraction of campaign and legislative time. In a study
utilizing television advertisements from the 2004 Congressional campaigns, these issues were
only marginally represented in the ads, with 3.3 percent of ads referencing abortion and 2.1
percent referencing gay rights (Arbour, 2014, p. 611). Druckman, et al. (2010) found that
“saliency of issues is a primary determinant of candidate engagement”, in this case referencing
saliency among constituents (p. 19). Senators serve constituents of various demographics across
an entire state and, thus, have to appeal to broad audiences with different interests and values.
Nonetheless, women’s and LGBTQ issues are incredibly important to women and LGBTQ
individuals, at the very least. Therefore, promise-keeping is very important, even if only to
smaller subsets of the population. An easy solution for this challenge is to look to a more
inclusive campaign media platform, one that does not limit a candidate’s time or space, to
maximize the data gathered on promises made. A more inclusive strategy was needed on both
sides — campaign issue detection and legislative action analysis.

While Sulkin (2011) selected television ads because they were costly, and short, the
opposite approach is to examine candidate websites because they are affordable and can host
nearly unlimited content. Sulkin (2011) found value in television ads because they are unmediated. They provide statements from the candidates themselves, rather than summaries from journalists, news hosts, or other secondary sources. Websites are similarly unmediated. Bimber and Davis (2003) conclude that “television ads and Web sites both present exclusively candidate-controlled messages” (p. 105), so the essence of the candidates’ views should be captured just as well. Similarly, Druckman, et al. (2010) suggest that “candidate Web sites provide the most comprehensive measure of a campaign’s full issue agenda” (p. 7).

To gather legislative actions, Sulkin looked at sponsorship and co-sponsorship because these efforts demonstrate action on issues, rather than on specific policy preferences. Her focus on addressing issues rather than supporting specific policies was justified in a study that included many issues, some of which represent a plethora of policy possibilities. These mammoth issues such as education, defense and foreign policy, budget, and jobs and infrastructure, could be addressed in many ways, according to many policy preferences.

While women’s issues and LGBTQ issues have their own complexities, they typically do not have the volume and/or range of legislative possibilities that Sulkin’s broader issue categories might. Being pro-education or pro-defense, for instance, could describe a variety of specific policy preferences. Likewise, the bills that address these topics tend to be comprehensive and, thus, lengthy. With broad topics and comprehensive bills, there is a greater opportunity for legislators to find fault with a bill’s approach or particular elements of the bill. In contrast, being pro-choice or pro-life are relatively specific positions and bills addressing abortion are typically fairly narrowly tailored and specific. The bills included in this study, specifically, are narrowly tailored. Therefore, vote records are sufficient to determine consistency on these more specific issues. Including vote records in my analysis, in addition to
(co)sponsorships, allowed me to assess whether candidates who shared an issue position online, but did not offer any sponsorships or co-sponsorships on the issue, will at least take the low-effort step of voting in a manner consistent with their stated preferences. This is another research design choice that allows for inclusive gathering of data to capture small and large efforts on issues that do not consume much of a candidate’s time/agenda.

This research recognizes the challenges of including voting records. For instance, while legislation on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues are typically straightforward, in some cases, there is still some nuance to consider. Legislators who identify as “pro-life” may espouse beliefs that abortion should be outlawed, but recognize the limits of the current law, and vote against restrictions that are likely to be struck down. Nonetheless, there are many legislative strategies that chip away at the right to abortion, mainly by limiting access and creating new challenges for Supreme Court interpretation; we can expect that Senators who campaigned as “pro-life” would support many of these. Likewise, Senators who identify as “pro-choice” have, historically, voted for some restrictions on abortion when they are framed as concerning safety or discrimination. Nonetheless, by coding campaign issues and positions carefully, and labeling legislation carefully, I have been able to include analysis of some of the more straightforward votes, which adds to the amount of data available on legislative action on these issues.

The conceptualization of promise-keeping that results from this inclusive strategy is different from the conceptualization Sulkin used. Sulkin’s agenda-based approach considered promise-keeping to be the consistent prioritization of issues from campaign into office. For instance, if a candidate split their campaign advertisement time evenly among three issues, the expectation would be that they would spend their legislating time evenly split among those three issues. Here, agenda/time consistency is not tracked, based on the assumption that few
candidates spend a significant amount of campaign or legislative time on women’s and LGBTQ issues. Instead, promise-keeping here is merely legislative action, (co)sponsorship or voting, that is consistent with stated positions (promises) on campaign websites.

**Time Period Studied**

It is important to acknowledge the unique time frame selected for examination. The 109th-113th (2005-2014) Congresses represent two sessions of single-party control of the presidency and both chambers of Congress, one Democratic and one Republican, and three sessions of divided government. Thus, an array of legislative possibilities existed. This period was also selected based on the high number of landmark legislations passed during the period and data availability through The Library of Congress Archive of U.S. Senate candidate websites. To summarize the period, I draw upon the Family Research Council (FRC), The American Association of University Women (AAUW), and The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), all national non-profit organizations with strong interests in women’s issues and LGBTQ issues. These are also the legislative reports from which I gathered legislation for inclusion.

**109th Congress**

Congressional agendas and national public discourse are affected by state-level actions. During the 109th Congress, the states saw a great deal of back-and-forth action on the issue of same-sex marriage. In 2004, the year prior to the start of the 109th Congress, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage. In March 2005, a California state judge ruled California’s marriage ban unconstitutional. In response, in September of 2005, the California legislature passed a same-sex marriage bill, but Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the bill. A year later, in September 2006, the California Court of Appeals agreed that the ban was illegal. The following month, on the other side of the country,
the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples were entitled to the same rights and benefits of marriage. While these actions took place in the states, the Federal Marriage Amendment was on the agenda in the Senate and there were candidates and sitting Senators who weighed in on the issue.

The 109th Congress took place immediately following President George W. Bush’s reelection. This was a period of unified government, with the executive and both houses of Congress under Republican control. It was Senator William Frist’s second and last Congress as majority leader for the Republican party, prior to his retirement at the end of the term. The 109th Congress was also Senator Harry Reid’s first Congress leading the Democratic minority. The AAUW Congressional Voting Record summarized the session, stating, “Emboldened by his re-election in November 2004, President George W. Bush, his administration, and the increased Republican majorities in the House and Senate joined to push a broad legislative agenda often at odds with the AAUW Public Policy Program.” HRC President Joe Solmonese wrote, “Our society is making incredible progress toward fairness and inclusion – but achieving equality in our political system has been another story,” citing Congressional leadership’s push for the “so-called Federal Marriage Amendment” and calling for HRC supporters to “reverse this course” through the upcoming elections. The FRC scorecard for the first session of the 109th Congress noted that, “The House recognized the renewed importance of Congress’ role in protecting the family by passing legislation... [but] The hard-fought victory of the 2004 election did not similarly translate into pro-family victories in the Senate” where they were, instead, focused on confirming judicial nominees. By the second session of the 109th Congress, FRC summarized, “this year the Senate acted on a number of important items including... an attempt to preserve traditional marriage, a ban on fetus farming, and votes to defend a parent’s rights when someone
transports a child across state lines to receive an abortion."

**110th Congress**

The question of the status of same-sex marriage remained a hot topic on state and national agendas during the 110th Congress. In September 2007, the California legislature tried again to establish marriage equality for the state legislatively, but again, Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed the bill. In May 2008, however, the state Supreme Court upheld the lower court ruling and California joined Massachusetts and became the second state to allow same-sex marriage. Rather than resolving the issue, the ruling seemed to exacerbate the conflict and later the same year, California voters passed Proposition 8, modifying the California Constitution to explicitly state that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in the state.

Another relevant issue that had been on the legislative agenda for years but found its way into the national spotlight during the 110th Congress was ending gender pay discrimination. The Paycheck Fairness Act had been introduced and failed in every Congress since the 105th. In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court denied Lilly Ledbetter’s claim of gender pay discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ruling that the 180 day period in which employees could contest pay discrimination applied to the initial act of discrimination, not each paycheck, as Ledbetter’s counsel had argued. These legislative and judicial setbacks stymied progress toward pay equality, but issue activists were not quite done.

For the remaining four Congresses, including the 110th, Senate party leaders remained consistent, with Senator Harry Reid leading the Democratic majority and Senator Mitch McConnell stepping in to lead the Republican minority. The 110th Congress, however, marked the last two years of President George W. Bush’s term in office and following the 2006
midterms, both houses of Congress were under Democratic control. In their 110th Congressional Voting Record, AAUW included that “While AAUW issues such as pay equity received significantly more time and attention than in previous Congresses, votes on the ongoing war, rising gas prices, the home mortgage crisis, the lagging economy, and attempts to override presidential vetoes took up a considerable amount of floor time in both the House and Senate—limiting the time available for Congress to consider other matters” (AAUW Action Fund 110th Congressional Voting Record). According to HRC’s end of session report, “The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community has made unprecedented progress in Congress over this two-year session.” This included passing hate crimes legislation, seeing some early progress on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), holding a hearing on the problems caused by “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and ensuring that the “Federal Marriage Amendment was dead on arrival” (HRC 110th Congressional Scorecard). As expected, if HRC had a good session, FRC was disappointed, stating, “In 2007, there were a number of votes, mostly hostile, related to families. Hate crimes, taxpayer funding of abortion and embryonic stem cell research, free speech and religious liberty are just a few of the votes the Democratic Leadership allowed to come to the floor. In 2008, with an election looming and a President vowing to veto anti-family legislation, this Congress decided doing nothing was a better alternative than putting their full radical agenda up for a vote” (FRC 110th Congress Scorecard).

111th Congress

With President Barack Obama newly elected and even larger Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, the 111th Congress could have been an opportune time for Democrats to move on LGBTQ issues and women’s issues. However, the 111th Congress focused primarily on the economic recession and healthcare reform, which limited time and energy available for other
topics. Nonetheless, one of the most prominent pieces of legislation to make it out of this Congress did include some important provisions for women. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) applied to Americans of all gender identities, but there were a few specific provisions that were of particular interest to women. For instance, a new provision was established allowing breastfeeding mothers to have reasonable break time from work to express milk for children under 1 year old, in a private place other than a bathroom. Additionally, maternity care was included as an essential health benefit and mammograms, cervical cancer screenings, pre-natal care, domestic violence screenings, and contraception were to be covered under qualifying plans with no cost sharing for the subscriber. In negotiating the passage of the ACA, President Obama signed an executive order recommitting to prohibiting federal funds from being used for abortion. This was disappointing to pro-choice activists, but also to pro-life activists who did not feel like an executive order was a strong enough guarantee. Nonetheless, there was plenty of evidence of progress for pro-choice activists, including that just three days after President Barack Obama was sworn in, the Mexico City Policy, or “global gag rule”, was rescinded. Since the policy was originally established in 1984, it has been in effect during all Republican administrations, but has been rescinded by each Democratic administration.

LGBTQ activists also had some notable policy victories in the 111th Congress. In 2009, President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act into law, expanding the definition of a hate crime to apply to crimes motivated by a victim’s gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. In December of 2010, the Democrats were able to pass the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” before partisan dynamics would shift in the new Congress.

FRC summarizes their disappointment in the 111th Congress first with an explanation of
their condensed report, stating, “Normally this document would only cover one session of each Congress. However, since this Congress should go down in history for breaking all the rules, we felt the need to review the legislative priorities for the combined 111th Congress. With the historic inauguration of Democratic President Barack Obama, those in Congress looking to pursue an agenda hostile to the family were emboldened to pass their initiatives with little regard for legislative procedure or precedent” (FRC 111th Congress Scorecard). Of course, on the other side of these issues, advocates celebrated. AAUW wrote, “The first piece of legislation the new president signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which reversed the Supreme Court’s misguided 2007 decision in Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. That initial victory in the fight for pay equity set the tone for a Congress that saw important progress for women and girls on a variety of AAUW issues” (AAUW Action Fund 111th Congressional Voting Record). The HRC 111th Congressional Scorecard also cited great progress, including the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the passage of hate crimes legislation, but stated that “there is still much work to do.”

In the states, California’s marriage equality journey was not over with the passage of Proposition 8. In 2010, the U.S. District Court ruled that Proposition 8 violated the equal protection and due process guarantees of the U.S. Constitution.

112th Congress

The Democrats lost their control of the House in the 2010 midterm elections and lost some seats in the Senate, resulting in a challenging political climate. While HRC remained positive in their 112th Congressional report, citing great support in the Senate, they were disappointed with the opposition to LGBTQ rights in the House and, overall, they did not see much new legislation at all. AAUW wrote that “Ideological wish lists were turned into message
bills that were guaranteed to win headlines and voter attention but had little chance of ever becoming law. Over the past 18 months Congress has struggled to pass bills, instead opting for partisan bickering” (AAUW Action Fund 112th Congressional Voting Record). Similarly, FRC summarizes, “Although liberals maintained a majority, it was no longer a filibuster proof one...action on pro-life and pro-family legislation was minimal” (FRC 112th Congress Scorecards).

California’s same-sex marriage legal battles continued. Eighteen months after the U.S. District Court ruled Proposition 8 unconstitutional, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed and upheld the ruling. With just one court left to weigh in, an end was almost in sight.

113th Congress
Partisan dynamics held over from the 112th Congress into the 113th, as President Barack Obama was reelected and Democratic control of the Senate was offset by a Republican-controlled House. After the 113th Congress, FRC opted not to include an introduction to their scorecard, but in the HRC 113th Scorecard, their President once again cited “unprecedented progress for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community,” going on to say that “Despite unusual levels of partisanship and gridlock on a range of issues from immigration to gun control, members of both parties were able to come together to advance historic, LGBT-friendly legislation.” This progress included the passage of the Employee Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), as well as the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) with specific provisions protecting LGBTQ Americans. AAUW was less pleased with the progress, stating, “President Barack Obama’s second term started with an ideologically divided Congress, unwilling or unable to move legislation in the most basic policy areas” (AAUW Action Fund 113th Congressional Voting Record).
The 113th Congress had a notable new member: Senator Tammy Baldwin joined as the first openly gay politician to be elected to the U.S. Senate. California’s marriage equality legal case finally made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 where it was dismissed, allowing the District Court ruling in favor of marriage equality to stand. In a case that they did hear, United States v. Windsor, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, allowing legally married same-sex couples to access the same federal benefits as married opposite-sex couples. The U.S. Supreme Court also declined to review marriage cases in five other states.

Summary of Time Period Studied

Rather than representing a period of consistent movement on LGBTQ and Women’s issues, the period was marked by rapid change. An assortment of legislation was introduced, with some bills under consideration during multiple years, and other actions appearing just once. This provided a good selection of legislative action to compare to candidate promises.

Definitions of key terminology

- Women’s Issues- In this study, women’s issues are primarily framed and defined by the candidates themselves. Rather than drawing upon the literature to determine a set list of issues that women value or that disproportionately impact women, statements are added to the dataset when a candidate declares, within the statement, that it is related to women. The women’s issues addressed by candidates included abortion (both traditionally pro-life and pro-choice statements), women’s health, anti-violence efforts, women in the workplace, treatment of women internationally, discrimination, social security, and women in the military. The frequency at which these issues surfaced is available later in Table 2: Issue Frequency (p. 72). Reports from The American Association of University
Women (AAUW) and The Family Research Council (FRC) were also used to explore women’s issues, but only to the extent that they appeared on candidate websites. In fact, much of the legislation mentioned in AAUW and FRC reports was excluded on the basis that it was too broad in scope to correspond to candidate statements.

- LGBTQ Issues: Similarly, LGBTQ issues were defined in this research by candidate statements. Candidates mentioned same-sex marriage (for and against), Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, discrimination, and hate crimes. The frequency at which these issues surfaced is also available later in Table 2: Issue Frequency (p. 72). HRC and FRC reports provided context for legislation that was proposed during the time period studied, but issues and corresponding legislation were only included if candidates framed the issue as an LGBTQ issue.

- Promises: This study considers both outright promises (“If elected, I will…”) and more general statements on issues to constitute promises. Because candidate websites serve the purpose of informing potential voters (or donors, supporters, etc.) about the candidate and the candidate’s platform, all statements on campaign websites are assumed to align with the candidate’s intended actions upon election. The details of these statements are likely the result of a campaign strategy that is based in the candidate’s values, but that also considers campaign research (usually polling and focus groups) that help refine general positions into specific winning statements. Campaigns also utilize expert messaging assistance and party framing, but candidates should have the freedom to articulate these messages in a way that is still consistent with their intentions post-election. As discussed later, these statements can range from just a few general words, to thousands of words that detail specific policy efforts.
• Promise-keeping- This study acknowledges the constraints that U.S. Senators experience in pursuing their legislative agendas once in office and also the constraints of researchers in assessing those efforts. Promise-keeping here is simply performing actions, (co)-sponsorships and votes, that are consistent with promises made on their campaign websites. Promise-keeping in this sense is not incredibly strict; it does not require Senators to deliver on promises and bring their ideas to fruition, just to act consistently in publicly recorded ways.

Theoretical Framework
Extant theory and research tell us a great deal about candidate communications, legislative promise-keeping, and the nature of political representation more broadly. The questions posed here are questions of whether substantive representation is possible in the absence of descriptive representation and whether legislators have cause to follow through on their promises regarding women’s and LGBTQ issues.

Focusing on issues that, historically, have not ranked among the “most important issues” among voters across the nation may seem odd. However, as previously outlined, women and the LGBTQ community have had to fight for their political and civic rights, so the extent to which they are represented is a necessary and important question to explore. Additionally, women’s and LGBTQ issues allow for a specific examination of “moral issues,” an area that has not been explored in detail previously. Lastly, current events have spurred interest in, and action on, women’s issues and LGBTQ issues. In January 2017, the day after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, women across the country took part in rallies, both in Washington DC and in their own states, to express concern for women’s issues; some also shared concern for intersecting issues such as LGBTQ rights. Regardless of where these issues have ranked in
importance for the American masses historically, these issues are incredibly important to smaller subsets of the population and are still relevant in the media today. After all, legislation on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues affect how, and even if, individuals can form their own families. Access to marriage broadly has been on the line for LGBTQ couples over the last decades, as well as specific related benefits like insurance coverage, inheritance, and decision-making proxy rights. LGBTQ individuals and couples have fought for employment security, housing security, and the right to adopt children. Women have fought for equal pay, protection from violence, and bodily autonomy. These struggles manifest in a variety of well-documented disparities in health and wellness outcomes. For the subset of voters who place a high value on these issues, it is important to determine whether promises made are promises that will be kept.

Determining whether legislators keep the promises they make during their campaigns is critical to understanding representation in an empirical sense, as well as in a normative sense. As campaign issues and resources evolve, reconciling available information with vote choice and with resulting legislative action becomes important. Extant literature describes candidate and representative behavior in a variety of ways.

In their 1963 piece, “Constituency Influence in Congress,” Miller and Stokes identified that a representative’s actions could be the result of their own attitudes or of their perceptions of their constituency’s attitudes (1963). Miller and Stokes find that, in spite of limited communication between representatives and constituents, it is actually both — a mixture of a representative’s own attitudes and their perceptions of their constituency’s attitudes — that shape their actions. In examining the use of websites as a newer mode of communication between representatives and constituents, it is important to revisit the dynamics of the constituent-representative relationship.
Following Miller and Stokes’ work and 45 years of other works in the field, Jane Mansbridge wrote “A ‘Selection Model’ of Political Representation” (2009) in which she asserts that U.S. representatives rely largely on a selection model at the core (that is, representatives rely on their own attitudes, because they were chosen as a result of those attitudes), and sanctions on the periphery (that is, legislators can be de-selected should their actions not reflect the attitudes of the constituency). This is important because it suggests that voters first and foremost select a candidate to serve as their representative based on character and political attitudes. This theory suggests that constituents and their representatives generally share many values and perspectives. Constituents do not expect a great deal of continued interaction after elections and they do not do a great deal of monitoring to ensure that their attitudes are aligned unless it becomes necessary. Sanctions would only become necessary if constituent and representative values and perspectives diverge and, even then, the representative and their constituents could communicate to understand each other’s reasoning before abandoning the principal-agent relationship. After all, their relationship is based on “mutual trust and common goals” (Mansbridge, 2009, p. 370).

Under a selection model, campaign promises are incredibly important. Mansbridge (2009) writes that voters “must have sufficiently good information at the time of selection about the potential agent’s motivation” (p. 381).

Miller and Stokes suggest that in 1958, voters had incredibly limited communication with or about candidates. Instead, they relied on party as an overwhelming indicator and most did not readily relate party to policy at all. Indeed “something like 84 percent of the vote that year was cast by party identifiers voting their usual party line” (Miller and Stokes, 1963, p. 54). While terms like “good information” and “limited communication” are somewhat vague as they traverse decades, the underlying desire for increased accurate information and more frequent and
extensive communication is still relevant. With greater information available at the fingertips of constituents, will representatives now openly communicate their policy preferences in the campaign/selection phase on specific, moral issues? If so, will they then follow through on their shared values and perspectives? These are the questions explored herein.

**Organization of remaining chapters**

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on concepts relevant to this study. The review of literature should provide an understanding of the foundations upon which this study rests. Chapter 3 then details the methodology of the study, including an explanation of the research question and hypotheses, as well as the procedures used to gather and analyze data to answer these questions. The hypotheses correspond to the promise making/promise-keeping process by first examining factors that may influence whether a Senator decides to make a promise at all. Then, characteristics of the promises are examined in relation to future promise-keeping activities. Finally, candidate or campaign characteristics affecting the rate of promise-keeping activities are explored. Chapter 4 describes the data gathered, providing descriptive statistics and frequencies. Chapter 5 then provides an analysis of the data, include descriptions of trends among the promises made, the rate of promise-keeping, and an exploration of broken promises. Chapter 6 attempts to place this study within political science literature and politics, including suggesting further research that could be useful in each area.

**CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature**

Extant literature in the areas of promise making, strategic ambiguity (or avoiding making promises), promise-keeping, PACs and advocacy group influence, and gender and campaigns provides a great deal of guidance on how to proceed and what to expect. A thorough understanding of LGBTQ issues and women’s issues is also critical. Candidates have an
incentive both to be broad in their appeals, but also to commit to particular types of issues. Women who are candidates, in particular, are expected to conform to certain issue platforms or to “own” issues in the same way parties “own” issues (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes, 2003). Exploring the intricacies of existing literature in these areas helps to form a solid foundation for this study.

**Promise Making**

Merriam-Webster defines a promise as “a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified.” Promises are a central component of political campaigns. Voters expect their elected officials to represent their interests and deliver results when their communities have unmet needs. Campaigns are a formal opportunity for candidates to let voters know what their interests are, what interests they perceive in their communities, and how they might begin to address those interests as they serve in office. As candidates discuss their campaign issues, voters perceive their issue positions and use those as part of their decision-making process. They may weigh other factors such as character or reputation, past performance in this office or another, party affiliation, or a variety of other information shortcuts, but at some point, candidates are making promises, voters are taking note, and the victor may have to answer for their progress toward the goals they espoused should they seek reelection.

While it is fair to say that all candidates make some promises, there is no comprehensive list of issues that candidates must address in order to run. Tracy Sulkin’s (2011) definition of promise making is “rooted in the content of candidates’ campaign agendas” rather than narrowly tailored to stated issue positions. Sulkin is interested in this broader conception because “position-based conceptions of promise-keeping… require that candidates actually stake out clear positions” (p. 10). Candidates are unlikely to take positions of every possible issue, but for
the positions candidates do choose to make explicit, the explicit statements are the most direct available “promises.”

Literature supports the idea that candidates will make some specific promises. David Mayhew’s *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974) presents the case that legislators are single-minded seekers of re-election. Mayhew suggests that on their path to re-election, legislators can utilize three primary tactics: advertising, credit-claiming, and position taking. For Mayhew, position taking is “the public enunciation of a judgmental statement on anything likely to be of interest to political actors” (p. 61). While Mayhew’s writings predate the first Senate candidate website by 20 years, the statements candidates make online are a clear example of position taking.

The functional theory of campaigns recognizes that campaign discourse generally falls within three categories: seeking acclaim, attacking, and defending both policy and character (Benoit, 2003). Using this theory, voters are exposed to various campaign materials then loosely evaluate the net results of positive and negative points for each candidate before making a choice. This study is concerned with candidate promises on policy only, but campaigns often rely heavily on policy over character (61 percent compared to 39 percent in Benoit, 2001), so researchers should expect a fair number of policy statements from candidates. Among the three types of discourse, acclaim is the most common, followed by attacks and, rarely, defenses (Benoit, 2003, p. 100). Airne and Benoit (2005) define policy as “remarks concerning governmental action and problems amenable to such action” (p. 480). What Airne and Benoit call policy is what will be considered promises here. That could include policy acclaims, but also policy attacks (referencing an opponent, and thus, promising not to do the same), or even policy defenses if a candidate chooses to respond to an opponent’s attack.
John Petrocik’s (1996) issue ownership theory suggests that, in their campaigns, candidates will emphasize the issues for which they expect to have an advantage. Those issues are largely determined by party reputations, but can vary candidate to candidate. It is likely, then, that if a candidate is running in a state in which their personal or party positions align with a large majority, they could expect an advantage over an opponent whose personal or party positions are less favored in the state. If this is the case, there is incentive to stake a claim to the issue and take a position.

While all candidates will make some campaign promises, there is no exact recipe for the right mixture of promises. Candidates must weigh many competing interests. There is incentive to take the most popular position on the most salient issues in the community, but there is also incentive for candidates to accurately describe what they plan to do in office. There is incentive for candidates to highlight the issue areas in which they are most knowledgeable, but there is also incentive for candidates to address their own weaknesses. There is incentive for candidates to outline their policy positions in detail to appease critical voters, but there is also incentive to remain ambiguous at times.

Ambiguity

Given the nearly unlimited space and discretion provided by websites as a platform, why wouldn’t candidates include their detailed issue positions and even policy preferences? Extant literature explains the benefits political candidates, and even elected officials serving in office, might experience when they choose to remain ambiguous rather than detailing specific issue positions. In this study, promise making is explored. When candidates fail to make their positions known, or choose to remain ambiguous, voters do not have the opportunity to evaluate their options before voting. This removes a critical piece of information from the promissory
representation model (Mansbridge, 2003).

Political ambiguity in campaigns has been a topic of interest for political scientists since Anthony Downs’ 1957 book, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Downs applied economic theory to argue that ambiguity allows candidates or parties to have broad appeal, but that citizens lose the ability to make a truly rational decision (vote) because the party and candidate positions are unclear. Shepsle (1972) investigated Downs’ claims and “restricted the validity of the premises of Downs’s argument” by demonstrating that broad ambiguity decreases candidate appeal and the utility of ambiguity is dependent upon the risk-averse or risk-acceptant nature of the voters (Shepsle, p. 567). Shepsle’s “strategy of ambiguity” then involves a candidate having some sense of the risk-related preferences of the voters and adapting their level of ambiguity. If voters are risk-acceptant or even risk-loving, candidates might maximize utility by remaining fairly ambiguous.

Benjamin Page (1976) offers an alternative explanation in his “emphasis allocation theory.” By taking into account imperfect information, Page argues that candidates do not just take stands, “they also allocate their speaking time, their press releases, and their media budgets so as to vary the emphasis on different appeals” (Page, p. 749). Rather than assuming candidates can accurately evaluate the risk and policy preferences of their voters, Page suggests that candidates estimate these elements to the best of their ability and allocate resources to support statements on the issues that will have the greatest impact. Broadcasting ambiguous positions may be one component of a strategy, but more silent ambiguity may be the result of limited resources rather than a clear strategy or a belief that a position on the particular issue would be harmful.

Aside from appealing to voters in the present campaign and election, candidates must
also take into account that if they are elected, the degree to which they keep campaign promises may serve as a point for evaluation in future elections. In this vein of thought, Sivan Frenkel writes about the balance of limiting promise making, with the desire to appear competent on various issues by developing and putting forth comprehensive policy plans.

Ambiguity is a challenge that every candidate must address, but how might they implement different strategies in different campaign materials? Michael A. Xenos and Kirsten A. Foot sought to address this question by comparing web and offline communications when it comes to five common claims about dialogue and position taking. Three of those findings are relevant here. First, 69 percent of candidates in their sample engaged in “basic position taking” in the form of an “issues” section of their webpage. This did not, however, mean that they addressed all issues pertinent to their district or that they made strong statements on any or all of these issues. Rather, Xenos and Foot set a minimum threshold that the issues were present somewhere on the webpages. Additionally, as with offline campaign materials, online position taking increases as the intensity of an election increases. In elections that are not competitive for whatever reason, candidates do not necessarily have to address a wide variety of issues with a great deal of detail. If an election is intense, candidates may want to use their expertise on particular issues to signal greater competency or similar values to voters. Xenos and Foot also found that, as in offline materials, incumbent candidates were less likely to have issues listed on their website, but in contrast to their prediction, they found that incumbent candidates’ volume of issue information was similar to that of challengers.

These authors have all written about ambiguity broadly and, occasionally, in reference to the “most important issues” facing the nation. Perhaps ambiguity applied to particular issues, such as women’s and LGBTQ issues, will operate differently in different times and spaces.
Broad, ambiguous statements on these topics are possible, but it is also common to hear positions stated, especially when it is clear that the national landscape is changing. Leading up to Supreme Court decisions about marriage equality, or following controversy over limits on abortion providers, elected officials often do make statements of support or criticism. While these events may not correspond to an election cycle directly, incumbents may distinguish themselves as champions of a cause, and challengers may use these national dialogues as a springboard.

**Promise-keeping**

Candidates may have reason to avoid taking a position or making promises regarding any issue, including LGBTQ issues and women’s issues. At the same time, if their district is particularly concerned with these issues, if they have something unique to offer, or if there may be funding available related to these issues, candidates may also choose to take a firm stance and offer policy recommendations or promises. Once these promises are made and a candidate is elected, will they follow through?

A 2014 poll, conducted during the final year in the period studied, found that only four percent of likely voters believe that candidates will keep their campaign promises (Rassmussen). However, as early as 1972, studies showed that “winning candidates in [the 1966 House] election generally voted as their pre-election issue positions predicted” (Sullivan & O’Connor, p. 1264). Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2001) found “a strong association between roll-call behavior in the 105th Congress and the electoral expression of preferences that preceded it” (p. 543). More recently, Sulkin (2011) found that, consistent with political science research but contrary to popular belief, members of The House of Representatives who made promises on particular topics were significantly more likely to devote their time and action to those topics in 15 out of the 18 topics that she examined. These issues ranged from corporate regulation and welfare to
education and Medicare (p. 66). When House candidates discussed these issues in their campaign advertisements, they spent significantly more time on them once they were in office. The Senate had less impressive results with statistically significant results in only 6 of the 18 categories, but Sulkin explains that some of the difference between chambers may be a result of the larger constituencies that Senators serve and the need to address a greater number of issues in the course of their work. When Sulkin drilled down and examined references to specific issue positions rather than broader agendas, she found that “in the Senate, 76 percent of legislators engaged in at least one introduction on defense that corresponded to the content of their appeal, and the same holds true for 70 percent of legislators for the environment” (p. 103). The lower rate of promise-keeping among Senators is the justification for focusing on Senators in this study. With promise-keeping being less frequent in the Senate, there may be enough variability to determine whether promise-level and candidate-level characteristics are associated with better rates of promise-keeping on these issues in particular. While promise-keeping linkages are much stronger in the House than the Senate, all of these figures are still much greater than the public perception. In fact, when we look at the complexities of promise-keeping, this is actually an incredible figure. Beyond asking whether candidates intend to keep their promises, we must ask whether and to what extent they are able to keep them. The complex political situations in which legislators exist limit what any individual may pursue legislatively. We can certainly look at whether they sponsor, co-sponsor, or vote on legislation in accordance with their promises, but that may not fulfill a promise completely and it also may not completely represent the full array of actions they could have taken on an issue.

From a purely practical standpoint, we would not expect that each legislator would introduce legislation on every issue included in their campaign. We might expect that they would
vote in accordance with their position if legislation made it to the floor, but complex issues leave a great deal of space to find fault with the wording or scope of a bill. Previous studies that utilized roll call votes acknowledged that they were only capturing legislative action from a single angle (Ringquist, Neshkova, & Aamidor 2013; Sullivan & O’Connor, 1972). Legislators are not limited to voting on, introducing, or co-sponsoring legislation as their only means of keeping a promise. Each legislator serves on multiple committees and many serve in partisan leadership positions. Through these means, they may be able to propel, delay, or even kill a bill. These actions can be harder to trace because they are often done silently and it may be that no single legislator takes responsibility for the progress of legislation or the lack thereof. For these reasons, scholars have focused on promise-keeping through introduction of legislation and co-sponsorships. This understanding of promise-keeping is somewhat restricted, but functional. Using this approach, Sulkin found that Senators average 285 promise-keeping activities per term (2011, p. 160).

Why then, do Americans not know about these promise-keeping efforts? There are a few very public instances of high-level officials making bold promises that were not kept. President Obama’s promise that Americans could keep their healthcare provider if they were happy and President Bush’s “No New Taxes” are two prominent, recent examples of promises that fell flat. Additionally, Ringquist, Neshkova, and Aamidor (2013) found that, during the period they studied (1993-2004), House members defected on their promises on environmental issues 31 percent of the time and Senators defected 41 percent of the time (p. 371). If voters are most closely following the few issues that legislators defect on, their skewed sense of promise-keeping could be explained. It could also be that the form of representation to which citizens subscribe does not require close monitoring. As Mansbridge (2009) writes, “selection” provides voters
with an opportunity to evaluate candidate character and interests on the front end and again, periodically, through elections, but if voters feel that they’ve made a good choice, they need not monitor their actions. Research on promise-keeping may shine light on national trends, but high incumbency rates suggest that voters either think that their own representatives do keep their promises, or they are unwilling to punish them if they do not.

**PACs and Advocacy Group Influence**

Political Action Committee (PAC) and advocacy group contributions and influence are an easy indicator of the increasing prevalence of women’s issues and LGBTQ issues in national politics during the period studied. The growth of PAC and advocacy group activity are also of interest here as potential motivators for candidates to take a stand on these issues. If candidates care about these issues but are weighing options regarding whether or not to feature these issues in their campaigns, they may be motivated to take that leap and invest in these issues so that PACs and advocacy groups will return the favor and invest in their campaigns. The financial and practical support that these groups offer can mitigate some of the risk associated with forsaking ambiguity and making bold promises.

While the public is often suspicious of money in politics and the influence special interest groups have on elected officials, organized advocacy and money can contribute to greater interest in, and action on, issues that would otherwise remain on the fringe of political agendas. On an individual candidate level, the literature reflects a connection between competence, position taking, and funding (Frenkel, 2012). Frenkel (2012) summarizes that it is interest groups that signal the quality of politicians by “giving more money to more qualified candidates” (p. 223) via financial endorsements. This is a shortcut that voters may take in selecting a candidate and candidates are, in turn, incentivized to seek endorsements. However, if candidates intend to
run for re-election and would like continued endorsements, they may need to (attempt to) deliver on relevant promises. How, then, do endorsements affect electoral outcomes? Funding and endorsements could signal to voters that candidate positions align with their own, but it could also be that the appeal of financial support or endorsements causes candidates who are less concerned with these issues to make promises in these areas for their own short-term gain.

Uncovering a legislator’s true intentions would be difficult, but it could be that legislators who are less invested on a personal level, but more invested because of endorsements or money, might vote for corresponding legislation, but not go to the extra trouble of sponsoring these measures. The influence and impact of PAC and advocacy group efforts is a growing area of interest for scholars interested in LGBTQ issues and women’s issues, as more and more funding related to these issues becomes available. If endorsed candidates see their promises through via (co)sponsorships in addition to roll call votes, that could provide support for the idea that endorsements go to legislators who are truly invested in the issues. If, on the other hand, endorsed candidates take the low-effort step of voting for appropriate bills but do not invest any time or energy in (co)sponsorships, it could be that the surface-level endorsement or funding was more appealing than actually championing the issue.

Campaign contributions from individuals and organizations who care about women’s issues and LGBTQ issues have been on the rise since the turn of the century. Figures 1 and 2, from Opensecrets.org, show contributions from individuals, PACs, and outside money for each cycle from 1990 through 2016. These figures include contributions to presidential races, as well as the congressional races that are the focus herein. While there is variation across years, they show increased contributions in the last 16 years, as compared to the decade prior. The increase in contributions on these issues nationally once again highlights the increasing prevalence of
these issues.

Figure 1- Opensecrets.Org

![Women's Issues Graph](image1)

Figure 2- Opensecrets.org

![Gay & Lesbian Rights & Issues Graph](image2)

Campaign contributions made to members of the Senate from individuals and organizations invested in these issues are represented in Figure 3. These graphs show that, unsurprisingly, money related to broad “women’s issues,” “pro-abortion rights,” and “LGBTQ issues” is largely given to Democrats, while “anti-abortion” money was given to Republicans. What remains to be seen is the potential impact of these contributions on legislator behavior.
Gender and Campaign Issues

There is a longstanding debate in Political Science regarding whether descriptive representation is required to meet the needs of particular populations or whether elected officials who do not share particular identities or subjectivities can provide substantive representation for those underrepresented groups. The question is relevant here for several reasons. First, we know that women and LGBTQ individuals are underrepresented in Congress. The number of seats held by individuals with those identities is not proportional to their numbers in the larger population. However, if elected representatives outside of those groups take up issues similar to group members, that bodes well for the possibility of substantive representation. Second, for there to be any chance of substantive representation, elected officials would not only need to take positions on issues that are important to women or LGBTQ individuals, but they would need to then act in a way that is consistent with their promises. While these two conditions are necessary for substantive representation, they alone are not sufficient proof of substantive representation. It is possible that given the current demographic composition of the Senate, members who are men...
might behave in ways that are similar to the women in the chamber, and Senators who are straight might behave similarly to Senators who are gay (for the part of the time period that had a gay Senator) but that if the demographic composition was different, and women or LGBTQ Senators were present in numbers proportional to the population, different dynamics and priorities could emerge. Nonetheless, this analysis also has the potential to reveal gaps in representation. If Senators from the underrepresented groups are having to champion their own issues without support from dominant groups, that is telling. Also, if promises on women’s and LGBTQ issues are made but not followed by consistent action from members of the dominant groups, that would, once again, point to a gap in representation.

The majority of literature on women’s campaign websites explores whether candidates who are women have embraced or rejected feminine stereotypes, based on the issues that they present (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes, 2003; Niven and Zilber, 2001; Schneider, 2014). Extant studies have found some differences in which issues men and women emphasize in their campaigns, including that women were more likely to mention women’s issues, but overall the differences have been minimal. Partisanship and political climate/context account for most of the difference in issue selection.

Scholars have also suggested that female candidates might produce a greater number of campaign promises or provide greater detail regarding the issues they discuss. This could happen due to concerns they have about competitiveness. For instance, Druckman, et al. wrote that “Female candidates, especially if they are trailing, could feel the need to engage on certain issues where they are considered weak in order to overcome that perceived weakness” (2010, p. 6). It could also be because they receive less news coverage overall, less favorable news coverage, and they have more difficulty making their issue positions known (Khan and Goldenberg, 1991). It’s
also possible that women might opt to cover more topics because they are uniquely equipped to address women’s issues specifically (Paolino, 1995).

Rather than collecting promises or issue positions on a set list of “women’s issues” or “feminine topics” broadly as previous scholars have done, I have only gathered promises that the candidates frame as women’s issues or that have clear, direct, impact on women primarily. A complete listing of these issues is included later. Based on the literature that suggests that women may make a greater number of promises, or more promises on “women’s issues,” hypothesis 5 posits that women candidates will make a greater number of promises and that Senators who are women will keep their promises at higher rates.

**Campaign Website Reach**

Campaign websites serve as a useful tool for examining promise making and promise-keeping because they are original sources preserved across time. Candidates and their campaign teams created websites so that voters, during the period studied, could access them and learn more about the candidate’s background, qualifications, and issue positions. Campaign websites were used to communicate critical promises that make promissory representation possible.

Campaign promises serve as a tool for selection for those who want to look beyond party. While partisanship is still an overwhelming factor in vote choice, voters today have much easier access to a variety of information about their candidates. Websites in particular are free or low cost to create, constantly available, and accessible by the majority of the population. Websites offered a venue in which candidates could share large amounts of information, at low to no cost, and have it reach anyone in their district with internet access. During the 2000 campaign season, 75 percent of U.S. Senate candidates had campaign websites and commentators were calling it the “first internet election” (Foot and Schneider, 2006, p. 9). By 2006, 94 percent of Republican
and 97 percent of Democratic U.S. Senate candidates had websites (Gulati and Williams, 2009). These websites provided accessible information about candidate issue positions directly from their campaigns. In 2006, 100 percent of all major party U.S. Senate candidate websites had issue positions listed either on the homepage or on a separate “issues” tab (Gulati and Williams, 2009, p. 56).

Campaign professionals recognized that young adults were using the internet to gather information on issues, as well as to engage in other campaign activity (Tedesco, 2006). In fact, 35 percent of Americans 36 years old and younger reported that the internet was their primary source of political news during the 2006 campaign (Rainie and Horrigan, 2007). The advent of this newer media channel coincided with record low engagement among young voters. Creating robust, engaging websites, then, might have been a logical attempt to reverse the trend. But what about older voters? Scholars seem to be somewhat divided on the reach and influence of campaign websites. Williams (2003, as cited in Druckman, Kifer, and Parkman, 2009) looked at usage rates of major and third party candidate websites during the 2000 and 2002 elections and found that visits to the websites ranged from 1,000 to 800,000 in 2000 and rose to 6,854 to 1,615,819 visits by 2002. Druckman, Kifer, and Parkman suggest that these numbers and the increased number of U.S. Senate candidate websites since then, mean that “online campaigns may have notable influence” (2009, p. 22). They go on to argue that the reach of candidate websites is undoubtedly much greater than the simple count of visitors, considering the indirect reach of activists and journalists who visit websites for direct, candidate-created materials and then spread that information more widely.

On the other hand, Sulkin (2011) cites Pew Research data (Rainie and Horrigan, 2007) showing that during the 2006 election, only 31 percent of American adults reported that they
used the internet to gather political news and information, of those, only 20 percent got information directly from candidate websites. Sulkin extrapolates that only approximately 6 percent of respondents visited campaign websites. However, of the 31 percent of respondents who used the internet to gather campaign information, more than half “cite the internet’s breadth of information and perspectives as a major reason for their online activity” (Rainie and Horrigan, 2007). While these numbers do make it clear that campaign websites have not replaced other, more traditional, media (television, newspapers, etc.) as the primary source of campaign information, campaign websites do appeal to potential voters seeking additional breadth and perspective, which is an important niche to fill.

In many ways, campaign promises made online allow voters to utilize a selection model of representation. This is particularly true in open seat races and for challengers, when voters do not have an incumbents’ previous service record to consider. Even for incumbents, though, campaigns and campaign websites provide an opportunity to assure any constituents who are monitoring their activity that they still share similar values and perspectives. If a representative’s position on issues has evolved since the last election, a new campaign is an opportunity to engage in the ongoing principal-agent communication that provides constituent confidence. This study seeks to determine whether the promises candidates make at the point of selection are upheld, or whether women’s and LGBTQ issues might be issue areas that require greater monitoring and possibly even sanctions.

**Women’s Issues**

Though women have been marginalized throughout most of history, there have been groups of women organizing to advocate for issues of concern for centuries. In the 20th century, women made great strides in political advocacy efforts, with one notable victory being obtaining
the right to vote. With the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, women were able to engage in electoral politics in new ways. This victory motivated suffragists to continue to push for equality in other arenas. Just three years later, Alice Paul advocated for the Equal Rights Amendment, a constitutional amendment explicitly stating that, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex” (ERA). That explicit protection has still not come to fruition, though women have continued to gain additional rights and protections through legislation and court rulings, particularly in Reed v. Reed (1971) in which the Supreme Court ruled that the 14th Amendment did, in fact, provide equal protection for women.

The issue of pay equity made its way to Congress by 1944 when Representative Winifred Stanley (R) introduced House Resolution 5056 prohibiting discrimination in pay on account of sex. Though the bill did not become law, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which did become law, addressed the same issue 19 years later. However, it can be difficult to prove pay discrimination is on the basis of sex under the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and even if it is proven, employers are only required to pay back two years’ worth of the difference in wages, which often makes pursuing a case more costly than the potential reward. In 2000, women earned just 73.7 percent of the earnings of their male counterparts and by 2014, the gap had narrowed, but only by a bit, bringing women’s earnings to 77.4 percent of men’s (Lane and Robbins, 2012).

In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed the Education Amendments of 1972, which included Title IX, to prohibit discrimination in academic activities on the basis of sex. At the time, Title IX was broad, but over the decades, additional guidance has been provided by The Department of Education and through case law, making the amendment critical for women and girls as they pursue education.
Another major legal moment for women in the 20th Century was the ruling in Roe v. Wade. The 1973 court case made abortion legal and provided guidance on the degree to which restrictions could be implemented for pregnant women depending on the trimester of the pregnancy. The decision referenced a “right to privacy” that was not explicitly mentioned in the constitution but that derives from several amendments taken together. As with most major legal issues, soon after the ruling came out, opponents of the ruling began working to challenge elements of the new standard. This included exploring issues of who must consent to an abortion procedure, how consent should be garnered, and whether waiting periods could be imposed. In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s three organizations, EMILY’s List (1986), WISH List (1992), and Susan B. Anthony List (1993), were formed to influence abortion policy by influencing electoral politics. In fact, by the 1995-1996 election cycle, “PACs that focus on the abortion issue rank among the top-ten types of single-issue and ideological PACs in candidate contribution” (Day & Hadley, 2005, p. 24). These PACs also expanded their focus beyond just bundling financial contributions, to include offering supports such as candidate training programs, voter drives, and more, all which makes engaging with the issue of abortion just a little more appealing.

In 1991, Anita Hill publicly accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment. The accusation brought a great deal of attention to the issue, but Clarence Thomas’ eventual appointment demonstrated that an accusation was not enough to prevent a well-respected man from continuing to grow in his career, and that greater intervention was needed to protect women in the workforce. Just a year later, following an historic election, 1992 was deemed the “Year of the Woman,” as more women ran and won at the federal level than ever before.
The 1990’s also saw the initial passage of the Violence Against Women Act (1994). After crime, specifically crime against women, rose steadily for decades, Congress decided to act with a comprehensive bill providing support to law enforcement and victim service agencies, enhancing penalties for offenders, and creating immigration provisions for abused foreign nationals currently residing in the U.S. The bill also included a civil remedy so that victims could sue their attackers in court. The civil remedy provision withstood court challenges until it reached the Supreme Court where it was ruled unconstitutional in 2000.

Congress has worked to increase rights and protections for women over time, consistent with developments in national public opinion. The period studied here reflects a continued increase in national support for equality. ANES data from 2000 to 2008 shows a nine-point jump in respondent feelings that “women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government” (The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior: Equal Role for Women 1972-2008).

**LGBTQ Issues**

When examining the types of promises candidates were making and the bills U.S. Senators were introducing at a given time, it is important to understand any progress that occurred prior. According to Zein Murib, the “political coalition and umbrella identity category” of GLBT was not solidified until the late 1990’s and early 2000’s through a series of meetings and negotiations hosted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force which included over forty executive directors representing diverse identities and issue areas that we now understand as part of the broader movement (Murib, pp. 14-15). During these negotiations, representatives discussed a broad range of priorities, as well as their fear that working in coalition could lead to an artificially narrow agenda. This fear was weighed against concerns about individual
organizations’ abilities to compete against their opponents on the Right who were organized and speaking with a single voice. In addition to negotiating which issues to prioritize as a coalition, there were a variety of questions of strategy. Would the coalition rely on legal arguments? Moral ones? What were the implications and consequences of pursuing one strategy over another?

An issue that clearly demonstrates that challenges of determining priorities and strategy is marriage equality. Marriage equality has been a priority for many gay and lesbian individuals since at least the 1970’s. Advocates for marriage equality argued that marriage rights are fundamental and that achieving marriage rights would normalize GLBT people in the eyes of the public. However, marriage equality was not a universal goal across the movement, as some activists believed that the movement needed to insist on personal rights and liberties without conforming to existing social norms such as marriage and heteronormative family structures. Others wanted marriage but perceived other issues as more urgent.

Leading up to the time period included in this research, marriage equality remained a very prominent social and legal issue. As the AIDS crisis took off in the 1980’s, lack of legal spousal protections became a widespread and publicized issue. The first statewide ban on same-sex marriages came about in 1973 in Maryland. The first domestic partnership law passed in 1984 in Berkeley, CA. The late 1980’s and early 1990’s produced an array of minor legal victories and protections for GLBT activists, but for every move advancing these rights, a new challenge would develop. For instance, after the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that same-sex couples could not be denied the right to marry, the legislature quickly passed an amendment to ban gay marriage. Two years later, a Defense of Marriage statute passed in Utah and just one year later (1996), President Bill Clinton signed the federal Defense of Marriage Act into law. Individual states continued to take action on the issue, with states and even municipalities
banning or allowing marriage, creating provisions for domestic partnership, and more. The 1990’s saw increased entry of LGBT individuals into public arenas including television and national politics. The decade also saw the passage of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (1994) and the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard. Interest in LGBT issues reached far beyond the U.S., with countless legislative and legal efforts, both pro- and anti- LGBT, taking place in dozens of countries around the world throughout the decade. All of these converging developments set the stage for active campaigning and legislating on these issues.

Important developments also occurred after the period of study began. In June of 2008, Representatives Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Barney Frank (D-MA), and others formed the Congressional LGBTQ Equality Caucus allowing LGBTQ members and allies a unique venue to explore legislative possibilities. Research has shown that members generally join the caucus for political reasons, but that they are the members who are most supportive of LGBTQ issues (Snell, 2017).

The Equality Caucus is overwhelmingly composed of Democrats, but the Democratic Party has not incorporated many LGBTQ priorities as their own priorities, possibly as a result of LGBTQ loyalty to the Democratic Party without conditions (Snell, 2017). The Equality Caucus has also served as a place where Republicans who do support these issues have been able to engage with colleagues across the aisle.

Paul Snell’s study of the co-sponsorships in the 111th and 112th Congresses revealed that partisanship was the primary predictor of sponsorship of pro-LGBTQ rights legislation, but that when all other factors are held constant, members of the Equality Caucus are likely to co-sponsor an additional 1.3-1.4 bills on LGBTQ topics. As recently as 2017, Snell summarized that, “there is a paucity of research on LGBTQ politics. The literature on LGBTQ issues in Congress is
especially sparse” (Snell, 2017, p. 325) Hopefully this project will add useful insights to this body of literature.

Summary
Extant literature has informed the research questions and hypotheses explored herein. Research indicates that U.S. Senate candidates will strategically release issue positions and priorities based on their personal values and their perceptions of the values of their constituents. These decisions may also be informed by strategic calculations of risk and resources. This study will contribute to the literature by documenting the types and characteristics of promises made on women’s and LGBTQ issues specifically. These issues have certainly been the focus of previous studies, but they have not been examined through a promise-keeping and representation lens in this way. Research also indicates that U.S. Senators are likely to keep their promises, though the extent to which they will do so is unclear. In a study utilizing television advertisements from the 2004 Congressional campaigns, these issues were only marginally represented in the ads, with 3.3 percent of ads referencing abortion and 2.1 percent referencing gay rights (Arbour, 2014, p. 611). “Women’s issues” was not utilized as a category. The rate and type of promise-keeping on these issues will serve as another important contribution to the literature. Beyond contributing to an academic understanding of promise-keeping, the implications for representation have normative value as individuals affected by these issues vote and make other political decisions.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Introduction
To begin to address the question of what promises Senatorial candidates make and whether they keep them when elected, the issue of what promises are made must be explored. A
quantitative and qualitative primary content analysis was applied to shed light on if candidates addressed these issues, how they addressed these issues, and whether there were distinguishing features among promises that are ultimately kept and broken. Sulkin’s (2011) analysis of campaign promise-keeping utilized elements of quantitative content analysis as her team reviewed, coded, and classified campaign promises within television advertisements. She and others who have studied promise-keeping have looked to televised campaign advertisements as a way to narrow in on the few issues that are most important to candidates or, at least, most emphasized to voters. By taking the opposite approach here and looking at a low-cost campaign product with unlimited space, websites, this study explored whether campaign promises are kept on less prominent issues.

There is a great deal of support for campaign website analysis in current literature. Monica Schneider called websites the “purest form” of candidate strategy available (Schneider, 2014, p. 270) and Kathleen Dolan summarized that “campaign websites let us see the decisions candidates and their staffs make about how they present themselves to the public in a very direct way” (Dolan, 2005, p. 33). Mary Banwart and Kelly Winfrey chose to study websites based on the “virtually unlimited space and full control over the development and design of the message” (Banwart and Winfrey, 2013, p. 615).

**Scope**

This study examined Senatorial campaign promises from a 10-year period from 2002 to 2012 and corresponding legislative actions from 2005 to 2015. This period was chosen based on data availability, partisan dynamics in Congress during these sessions, and because there are several landmark legislative actions that came about during the period. Primary goals of the study were to understand the promises being made on these issues at the time and to analyze the
extent to which they were kept. Senate candidates were the focus of this study, in part because Sulkin (2011) found that “promise-keeping linkages are very widespread for the House, but are less so for the Senate” (p. 77). Studying the chamber with less substantial promise-keeping linkages should yield greater variability. Greater variability should allow a better opportunity to determine whether characteristics of promises or candidates impact the likelihood of future action on these issues.

The scope of this study does not include any comparison of promises and actions on women’s and LGBTQ issues to promises and actions on other types of issues. It also does not address, in a complete way, the motivations of candidates/Senators as they make and keep or break their promises. Finally, the study does not seek to suggest that Senators can only support or hinder women or LGBTQ people through (co)sponsorships and voting on legislation. As mentioned earlier, Senators can have immense impact on legislation through committee work, party organizing, and other means. Failure to act in the ways I have measured does not mean definitively that a Senator is not engaged on these issues. Acting in these ways also does not guarantee that a Senator would never privately forsake the cause. Using public records is appropriate, practical, and meaningful in many ways, but it cannot capture all efforts.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

While candidates have incentive to remain ambiguous in some circumstances, there certainly are some candidates who do make promises on LGBTQ issues and women’s issues and there are some elected Senators who champion these issues.

**Research Question:**
What promises related to women’s issues and LGBTQ issues do U.S. Senate candidates make on their websites? Do U.S. Senators keep promises that they made on women’s issues and LGBTQ
issues once they are elected?

**Hypotheses:**

*Promise Making*

*H1:* Candidates in open races or those opposing an incumbent will be more likely to assert an issue position and more specific language on their website than incumbents.

Incumbents have a well-documented advantage in campaigns. Candidates in open races or opposing an incumbent need to distinguish themselves, appeal to voters, and build a reputation. For this reason, candidates in open races or opposing incumbents may take the risk of making promises rather than remaining ambiguous.

*H2:* As women’s and LGBTQ organizations grow and provide greater numbers of endorsements and funding, candidate websites will be more likely to include issue positions and to include more specific discussion on these topics.

Campaigns are expensive. As women’s and LGBTQ organizations raise more money and contribute more to candidates, candidates have greater incentive to support these issues in more visible ways to ensure their inclusion as recipients.

*Promise-keeping*

*H3:* Senators who made promises in regard to women’s or LGBTQ issues on their websites will keep their promises in the following sessions/term at a high rate.

Literature indicates high rates of promise-keeping across a variety of topics. Women’s and LGBTQ issues are relatively less prominent in campaigns compared to issues such as the economy, education, healthcare, or national security. If candidates choose to include these issues in their campaigns, they have done so deliberately and have identified some rationale for doing so, whether the issues are a personal passion of theirs, or simply issues that resonate among their voters/constituents. Whatever reason led them to include these issues in the campaign is also likely to lead them to follow through on these promises in office.
**H4:** Senators who made promises in regard to women’s or LGBTQ issues on their websites will be more likely to (co)sponsor legislation on corresponding issues than their counterparts who opted not to make such promises.

Once again, candidates who opt to make commitments on women’s and LGBTQ issues have identified a rationale for doing so. The same rationale may lead them to become issue leaders once in office.

**H5:** Female Senators will be more likely to make and keep campaign promises on women’s issues than their male counterparts.

Proponents of descriptive representation argue that shared identities improve representation. Female Senators have personal experience that provides unique insight and investment in women’s issues. It should follow, then, that female Senators will champion issues that affect women.

**Characteristics of Promises**

**H6:** Senators who have made campaign promises with specific language will be more likely to keep those promises once elected.

For a candidate to provide specific promises and use specific language in a campaign, the candidate must have put some thought into their position on an issue. Those with extensive, specific plans outlined in a campaign may be a step ahead of their colleagues with less developed plans when they take office. It is, thus, reasonable to suggest that those with specific promises may keep their promises at a higher rate.

**H7:** Senators who’ve made campaign promises and those who make promises of greater length will be more likely to keep those promises once elected.

Candidates with extensive plans outlined in a campaign have invested some time and effort in developing and articulating their positions. Their investment in an issue early on may indicate investment in the issue in the long term.
Data Collection

Legislation

The goal in regard to legislation selection was to include many of the most prominent bills on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues during the possible time range established by data availability, which was 2000-2018. In the first phase, legislation listed in The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Congressional Scorecard, The American Association of University Women (AAUW) Congressional Voting Records, and The Family Research Council’s Congressional Scorecards for the included sessions was considered, but only legislation that addressed women’s and LGBTQ issues directly were included. For instance, HRC and FRC often include confirmation votes for judges in their scorecards, but these votes were not included because judges address an array of issues, so their confirmation votes are not narrowly tailored enough. Likewise, AAUW often included education bills that were more broad than could be tied directly to gendered campaign promises found on websites.

The second phase of legislative data collection involved searching Congress.gov for legislation related to the following terms: “women,” “gender,” “abortion,” “equal pay,” “LGBT,” “gay,” and “same sex.” The standard for inclusion was the same. Legislation had to address women’s or LGBTQ issues directly, and addressing those issues had to be one of the primary functions of the action. There is no distinction among the included legislation between bills with the sole purpose of addressing an included issue and bills whose purpose is only partially to address an included issue. If the bill addresses the issue as one of the primary functions, it was included as an effort that would satisfy a related promise. Resolutions were not included, as they have little impact on practical outcomes for women and LGBTQ individuals and, thus, more closely resemble promise making than true action. Resolutions typically affirm that the (co)sponsors and those who vote on the matter support or condemn a group or an action, but if
Senators wanted to offer material or regulatory support or restriction, they typically have the power to do so through (co)sponsorship of impactful legislation.

Additionally, only legislative actions with 1 or more cosponsors (beyond the primary sponsor) were included, representing a very minimal threshold of effort. This requirement was established to exclude efforts that were not serious attempts to make law. The vast majority of introduced bills have multiple co-sponsors, so the introduction of legislation that was not effectively pitched to a single additional Senator represents a lackluster effort. Co-sponsors are credited alongside primary sponsors because it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine who is putting in the work behind the scenes to move a bill. Additionally, Senators may be better off co-sponsoring a bill rather than duplicating the effort to introduce a similar bill, knowing that only one bill on the topic is likely to move. This standard of inclusion and exclusion is designed to recognize those who do the work of collaborating with peers to put forth a bill that has an impact on women or LGBTQ communities.

Legislation was, on occasion, coded as corresponding to multiple issues. For instance, a bill that addresses access to resources for women in the military who are raped would qualify as both a “Women in Military” issue and an “Anti-Violence” issue.
The five sessions of Congress selected each had several relevant legislative actions. Over the five sessions, a total of 25 votes and (co)sponsorships of 397 bills are included. There were some bills included that addressed both women’s and LGBTQ issues. Among the 397 bills that were included, most had many co-sponsors, so a total of 6,042 total (co)sponsorships on women’s and LGBTQ issues were documented. Not all candidates had made promises on these
issues, but among those who did, 631 of the (co)sponsorships corresponded to a promise.

By starting with the legislation that was introduced and working backward, I recorded relevant (co)sponsorship and voting activity of each Senator serving at the time. I then used the Library of Congress’ United States Elections Web Archive to find their campaign websites from the previous election cycle to see whether women’s and LGBTQ issues were represented and, if so, how the candidate described their position, including whether they were for or against the issue, as well as several other rhetorical features and candidate characteristics.

**Websites**

Only 100 (or so) Senators serve each session and each Senator typically serves through multiple sessions, so the websites of all winning Senatorial candidates (Senators) that were available in the data set were included, capturing the majority of the target population. Only winning Senate candidate websites are included because defeated candidates have no opportunity to keep their promises. Because the target sample was 100 percent of available websites, or a census, the first step was to compile a list of Senators serving in each session and their corresponding election dates.

A total of 251 unique election websites were expected to correspond to the winning Senate candidates. A portion of the websites from the selected sessions were not available in the Library of Congress’ United States Elections Web Archive. Though the archive description stated that websites from 2000 were included, no Senate websites from that year were located which reduced the number of possible websites by 33, bringing the total to 218. Several from 2002 only had the front page archived, not any of the relevant tabs. Twelve of the missing websites belonged to candidates who had been appointed or had run in a special election. This was not a significant problem because the sites that were not archived appear to be random and
should, thus, not impact analysis that follows. Of the remaining missing websites, 13 belonged to Democrats, 16 to Republicans, and two to Independents. Twenty-seven belonged to men, while four belonged to women. The missing websites belonged to candidates from a variety of states, with Massachusetts, Kansas, Oklahoma, North Dakota, and Vermont candidates each having two missing websites, while no other states had more than one. In the end, 172 websites were properly archived and available for inclusion.

Because the literature indicates that substantial content changes are rare on candidate websites (Sulkin, Moriarty, and Hefner, 2007; Banwart and Winfrey, 2013), data was collected from a single snapshot of each website from late October or the nearest pre-election date available. Scholars have argued that campaigns are dynamic and new issues can be introduced at any time as the result of an opponent’s actions (Windett, 2014). However, for the purpose of this study, as long as the issue was addressed before the last couple of weeks of a campaign, it was included. In this study, when a promise was made is less important than whether and how it was made.

In addition to coding data quantitatively for statistical analysis, I utilized a text-driven content analysis approach to explore the corpus of promises that appeared on candidate websites, including open and axial coding. In order to determine the unit of analysis and an appropriate coding schema, I first read through a selection of available websites for basic understanding. Candidates often addressed these issues with a single bullet point or phrase, so phrases are the smallest units captured, but promise statements on unique topics are the unit of analysis, however long they may be. A deductive-inductive strategy of code creation was used because a basic set of issues or codes were identified simply by looking to the list of legislative actions that moved during the period studied. Those basic issue areas required exploration for the basic promise-
keeping analysis, though issues would have been dropped from the project if they did not appear on candidate websites framed in appropriate ways. Additionally, previous studies, namely Sulkin’s, identified characteristics of promises, such as specificity, references to the past or future, etc., that might be correlated with promise-keeping, so those characteristics were gathered and coded as well. Though these deductively determined categories provided an initial set of codes, other codes were added as the first set of websites was explored to capture issues related to women or LGBTQ identities that did not make it into legislation and also to capture some of the nuances of the promises that did relate to legislation. Fourteen major issue codes were utilized, with nine related to women’s issues and five related to LGBTQ issues. These topical/issue categories were clearly separable, allowing each promise or statement fragment to be coded as one and only one topic, striving for Krippendorf’s (2004) standard of “exhaustive and mutually exclusive” categories (p. 132).

Data was gathered from every website tab that included content created by the campaign. This included biographies or “about the candidate” tabs, issue/priorities tabs, “candidate record” tabs, and more. This proved useful, as there were many promises on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues that appeared in unlikely places. For instance, several candidates mentioned “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” on a military-specific tab rather than an LGBTQ-specific tab. Lisa Murkowski even included a statement related to Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) on a website tab titled “Fisheries” because she had successfully negotiated government purchase of Alaskan salmon for the program. Materials not created by the campaign were not included. This meant that “News” sections that linked to content from other sources were excluded. Videos were also excluded, even if they were created by the campaign, because the archived sites usually did not allow videos to be played.
Many websites had no mention of the focus issues and were thus coded as zeros on issue presence. Websites with no mention of these issues were still of interest in that they helped determine whether those with mention are more likely to sponsor relevant bills than those with no mention (H4). For the remaining sites, I gathered all of the data described in the next section. Of the 172 unique websites included, 110 had content coded as women’s issues, 49 had content coded as LGBTQ issues. This provided 276 promises to analyze.

For each Senator who voted on the included legislation, background information was collected about the Senator and their district including the Senator or candidate’s gender, state, party, and seat status (incumbent, challenger, or open). This data was collected to allow for analysis of candidate characteristics that might be associated with higher rates of promise-keeping.

Table 1. Data Gathered from Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>This was required to match vote records to candidates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>This was required to match vote records to corresponding campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>State may help determine patterns of promise making or promise-keeping across particular regions or in districts with particular demographics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>The issues examined here are largely partisan. Party may serve as a control variable. It is also an opportunity to explore when Senators vote against party lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Present</td>
<td>Coding for whether LGBTQ issues or women’s issues are present at all is the first level of information required to determine whether candidates who do make promises or statements are any more likely to follow through on these issues than those who made no mention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>H6 suggests that more specific appeals will lead to greater promise-keeping on these issues. Sulkin found that specificity was not related to (co)sponsorships broadly, so this will test that finding here on more specific issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past/future</td>
<td>Sulkin found that references to the past and future were largely unrelated to promise-keeping behavior, so this will test that finding on more specific issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sulkin found that references to one’s self or opponent were largely unrelated to promise-keeping behavior, so this will test that finding on more specific issues.

On the issues included here, legal, moral, or logical arguments could be made. Collecting argument framing will allow for testing to see whether particular frames lead to greater follow-through.

H7 suggests that spending more space discussing an issue may predict greater follow-through.

The analyzed text was saved into the database for convenience. Excerpts in chapter 3 and 4 provide examples of different statements that are coded in particular ways. This offers greater clarity to readers.

### Promises

Each website included in this study was coded for the presence or absence of women’s issues or LGBTQ issues. These two issue areas were coded separately, but during a single website visit. Additional data gathered and coded included basic issue positions (for/against), whether the statement was specific, whether there was a reference to past or future action, and whether there was a reference to self or the opponent. The rhetorical features included here are mainly informed by the literature (Druckman, 2010; Sulkin, 2011). “Claims that candidates make about themselves should serve as better indicators of their interests and later activity than claims that criticize the opponent, and that the linkages between appeals and legislative priorities could also vary with specificity, tense (i.e., referencing the past or future), and the prominence of an issue, although the direction of the expectations for these features was less clear” (Sulkin, 2011, p. 70). Sulkin found that among House candidates, specificity was negatively related to follow-through, meaning that “candidates who made specific appeals were less active than those who were vague” and that the relationship was not statistically significant among Senate candidates (p. 72). Referencing the past on moral issues did not have a statistically significant impact on future activity for House or Senate candidates, while referencing the future on moral issues actually had a statistically significant negative correlation with future action.
Additionally, I observed that promises clustered around three primary frames: moral, legal, logical or, in some cases, a combination. This framework was created during the exploration of the first set of websites and based on pre-existing knowledge of the issues and the rhetoric commonly observed. The clusters were consistent across the larger corpus of promises as well. Lastly, I collected the word count on each topic/issue. This data was collected to allow for analysis of characteristics of a promise that might be associated with higher or lower rates of promise-keeping.

As previously discussed, literature on promise-keeping often looks at issues by category or theme—health, defense, moral issues, etc. This is done for practical purposes—to reduce hundreds of issues into just 20 or so categories. The challenge though, is in coding issues to fit neatly into categories. Take, for instance, the issue of abortion. For liberal candidates, abortion is a health issue. It is part of a full spectrum of reproductive health services, which women have a constitutional right to utilize. To a conservative candidate, however, abortion may be a moral issue, with the intentional termination of fetal life falling outside of the scope of “healthcare.” Does a researcher then decide which category the topic of abortion should fit within on their own? Or do they code it according to the frame set forth by the candidate? The content analysis performed here utilized 12-14 (depending on the analysis), much smaller, mutually exclusive issue categories or topics within the two issue areas to address women’s and LGBTQ issues in a more direct way. For example, rather than the broad categories of health and moral issues that forced the researcher to make a determination for the topic of abortion in the previous example, in this analysis, pro-abortion rights or anti-abortion are the categories directly.

Issues were included and coded if, and only if (with one exception), the candidate framed them as women’s or LGBTQ issues. This departs from the practice in the literature, which has
relied on an established list of “women’s issues,” or issues that affect women most directly. For instance, issues that impact the family have often been categorized as women’s issues. In my assessment, I looked to determine whether the candidate was making a promise to, or for, women or LGBTQ people, so I only included instances in which those statements are explicit. For instance, many candidates wrote about improving education. Broad statements about education were not included, but any statements specific to women or girls were. For instance, Bob Casey stated that he “will especially work to establish new scholarship incentives to help steer more students, especially women and minorities, into the fields of math, science and engineering.” That statement was included. On the other hand, Mark Pryor stated:

I support some traditional ideas, like raising teachers’ salaries to keep our best and brightest educators in the state. I support providing our high school students with the opportunity to further their education at institutions of higher learning, regardless of their economic background. Also, I will work hard to increase Title I funding for disadvantaged children and reduce class size for students in first through third grades.

which was not specifically linked to the benefits for women or girls, so that statement was not included. The only exception to this standard of coding was on the issue of abortion. There were several candidates who spoke about a desire to protect unborn life without explicitly mentioning women. Because the vast majority of “pro-life” legislation restricts action that pregnant women (or, more rarely, transmen or non-binary people) may take, and does not apply to cisgender men, and because some candidates did frame the issue as related to women, I have included “pro-life” statements as related to women. Additional categories of promises on women’s issues included: health issues, violence, work issues, international women’s issues, discrimination, social security, and women in the military. LGBTQ issues/promises that were present included: “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, traditional marriage/marriage equality, hate crimes, and discrimination. A full list of the issues included in the coding scheme is included in Table 2 (p. 72).
I utilized data from Congress.org to credit each (co)sponsor of the included bills or amendments and to tally their votes. The search terms utilized produced results that were, typically, clearly related to one or more of the issues included in the coding scheme. Legislation was included if addressing an included issue was one of the primary purposes of the bill. Legislation was excluded if the primary purpose fell outside of the issues that appeared on candidate websites. For instance, the search term “women” produced many results that were bills that had an impact on “men and women,” meaning “people,” but unless the bill was tailored to an issue that appeared as a women’s issue on candidate websites, the bill was excluded. There were also many bills that addressed tariffs on women’s footwear, but no candidates addressed the affordability of women’s footwear on their campaign websites, so those bills were excluded. As bills were added to the database, the corresponding issue was marked and the (co)sponsors were credited for the action.

**Analysis of Promise-keeping**

Because I collected and coded data manually as the sole researcher, I was intimately familiar with the data by the end of the first phase of data collection and coding. A corpus of 276 promises from 172 websites provided adequate data for content analysis, but did not require the use of automated content analysis.

I entered promises, votes, and (co)sponsorships into SPSS 25 and used those promises and actions to compute new “kept” and “broken” variables for each issue-action combination. The unit of analysis was the individual promise. Characteristics of the promise and the promise maker (candidate/Senator) remained alongside each corresponding promise. The dependent variable was promise-keeping status, kept or broken. Promises were coded as “kept” if the statements that appeared on a candidate website corresponded to the vote for, or (co)sponsorship
of legislation consistent with the statement. Promises were coded “broken” if votes or (co)sponsorships were inconsistent with promises. After SPSS identified the kept and broken promises, and revealed a small number of broken promises, I gathered those broken promises in a separate document for further review.

In my analysis, Senators were not penalized for failure to vote, but they were penalized if they voted in opposition to their prior promise or if they made a promise and failed to (co)sponsor any related legislation. The choice not to penalize for failure to vote is based on the reality that Senators are sometimes absent for a variety of legitimate reasons. However, Senators should at some point in a six-year term, if not in each two-year session, sponsor some related legislation.

The dependent variable in most of the questions I have posed is a dichotomous variable, kept or broken. For the questions regarding promise making, the dependent variable is also dichotomous; candidates either made a promise or they did not. For that reason, I used binary logistic regression to test whether the independent variables (gender, party, and incumbency status) are correlated with promise making or promise-keeping on these issues. Similarly, I examined whether characteristics of the promises themselves such as specificity, past or future orientation, or framing are correlated with promise-keeping. Promise-keeping actions were also gathered as a continuous variable, so I also ran a few multiple regressions to determine if there are variables that are correlated with the number of promise-keeping activities a Senator performs in a term.

**Content Analysis of Promises**

Content analysis is a research method that allows the researcher to take content (survey or interview responses, documents, etc.) and explore them as data. Content Analysis can be both
quantitative and/or qualitative. Quantitative content analysis can involve not only counts, but also the distribution or frequency of data points of interest within a corpus. The data collection and analysis of website content described previously for this project is consistent with the aims of quantitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis seeks to look beyond the numbers to uncover trends within the corpus that cannot easily be counted. This can include analysis of language choices, themes, rationale, and other trends. Some of these observations can be supported with counts of words or phrases within the corpus, but the observations extend beyond the quantifiable.

With qualitative content analysis, especially, it is important to apply a rigorous procedural logic to guide analysis. In this project, the sampling strategy previously outlined provided the data for both the quantitative and qualitative analysis. The unit of analysis used here is the promise, which could vary from a few words, to several paragraphs. This is consistent with Airne and Benoit’s (2005) definition of a theme as a “textual excerpt [that] focuses on a single idea” (p. 478).

Content analysis offers researchers several distinct advantages compared to other research methods. A primary advantage of interest here is that it “preserves the conceptions of the data’s sources” (Krippendorf, 2004, p. 41). For example, content analysis as utilized here, allows for the examination of campaign promises directly, in their original form. Statements taken directly from candidate websites can be examined as data, which eliminates any potential for distortion through interpretations, whereas surveying or interviewing candidates, campaign workers, or voters about past promises would be a less direct examination and respondents or interviewees could be influenced by the time that has passed since the promises were made. Additionally, content analysis is unobtrusive and there is no risk of the researcher influencing the
source; the risk of researcher bias is limited to the sampling and analysis phases. Also, the researcher is not dependent on the schedules and whims of human subjects to gather the requisite data. A final distinct advantage is that the data required for content analysis can be gathered after events have occurred, often from anywhere, at the convenience of the researcher, making content analysis projects accessible to researchers with limited financial resources.

Preserving the conceptions of the data’s source was listed as an advantage of content analysis, but to examine a preserved dataset, researchers must uncover the context in which the data was created and responsibly convey that context to their readers. This can become burdensome compared to other methods, such as surveying or interviewing in which that burden could be partially transferred to study participants who would naturally convey context in their responses.

For the research questions described here, content analysis is the most appropriate method for several reasons. First, an examination of promises made should examine those promises directly. It would be less accurate to examine individuals’ reflections on, or third-party characterizations of, the promises they made, when the promises themselves are available through archives in the very format in which they made them. Content analysis allows for both the coding of promises topically, and the capture of characteristics of promises. Additionally, qualitative content analysis methods provide a procedure for examining the promises as a corpus, separate from the quantitative and descriptive data collected individually, to assess whether and how these promises relate to one another and speak to the issues of the time.

**Limitations**

Women’s issues and LGBT issues have been discussed in campaigns for decades, but based on the availability of candidate websites, which were first archived in 2002, this study is
limited to recent history. Based on the most relevant legislation introduced in the period when the best data sources were available, legislation from the 109th-113th Congresses (2005-2014) and the preceding campaigns for members of those Congresses were included in the study.

There were also limitations that emerged in the data. When looking at Senator’s votes for legislation as a promise-keeping activity, there was an incredibly high rate of promise-keeping. In fact, only 2% of promises were broken. Initially, I expected a high rate of promise-keeping, but I did not imagine it would be quite that high. The lack of variability in the Senator’s votes limited some possibilities for statistical analysis. However, the data on co-sponsorships provided better insight into which Senators were and were not taking action beyond voting.

In spite of these limitations, this study tests some of Tracy Sulkin’s findings regarding promise-keeping on more limited issues with a different data set. Women’s issues and LGBTQ issues are of increasing relevance in politics today and they continue to be critically important in the lives of women and LGBTQ identified individuals. Any additional knowledge about promise making or promise-keeping trends on these issues could be important to researchers, as well as to voters in the coming election cycles.

**Summary**

Krippendorf (2004) identifies unitizing, sampling, recording/coding, reducing, inferring, and narrating as the six components needed “to proceed from texts to results.” In this study, unitizing begins at the website level, capturing and recording promise statements, however long, that the candidate identifies as related to women or LGBTQ individuals or communities. The sampling strategy used here is a census, minus any data that is unavailable or incomplete in the archives. This produced 172 websites for analysis, which, together, created 276 unique promises for analysis. The Library of Congress Archive recorded the website data that is the primary
source of data for this study. Krippendorf (2004) suggests that coding recorded data is essential within Content Analysis to “transform unedited texts… into analyzable representations” (p. 84). Promises were coded thematically to analyze promise features and promise-keeping rates, but they were also coded using open and axial coding to determine patterns and trends inductively. The data was then reduced into themes and will be subject to inference and narration in the description of findings and conclusions in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter will describe the results of statistical analyses that were performed to explore the hypotheses established in Chapter 3. This includes a presentation of descriptive statistics such as frequencies of appearance of particular promise characteristics and the number of (co)sponsorships on included subjects by session. It also includes the results of the binary logistic regression and multiple regression tests mentioned in Chapter 3. Samples of text directly from candidate websites will be provided, where appropriate, as examples of the characteristics of promises that were collected for analysis. The data described here will illustrate the promises that appeared on candidate websites, clarify the characteristics of interest, and provide initial statistical results that are put in context in Chapter 5.

Promise Data

The frequency of the appearance of women’s and LGBTQ issues on the included websites is represented in the first section of Table 2. The percentage of Senators with relevant issues included on their websites is represented at the bottom of Table 2. While there was steady growth in representation of LGBTQ issues (as a percentage of available websites), women’s issues did not increase (even as a percentage) across the sessions as expected.
Table 2. Issue Frequency on Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>109</th>
<th>110</th>
<th>111</th>
<th>112</th>
<th>113</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANY Women’s</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reproductive Health</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Issues</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Violence</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Issues</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Women’s Issues</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro-Social Security</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Military</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any LGBTQ</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-DADT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Marriage</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Hate Crimes</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Marriage Equality</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Websites included per session</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of websites with ANY women’s issue</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of websites with ANY LGBTQ issue</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Categories- Women’s Issues**

The “Health Issues” category included many mentions of breast and cervical cancer funding, research, and services. This is consistent with other research on campaign appeals from the time period. For instance, Arbour found that in 2004 Congressional campaign television
advertisements, “Republicans focus on breast cancer research, a very narrow and specific appeal” (p. 615). The category also includes mentions of the WIC program, SNAP and other nutrition initiatives, etc. Statements in support of access to contraception and abortion rights were excluded and counted, instead, in the “Pro-Reproductive Health” category. Generic statements about health insurance that did not reference women specifically were also not included.

“Anti-Abortion” was included as a women’s issue, even though some candidate mentions of anti-abortion efforts did not mention women explicitly. This category included statements that categorized abortion as morally wrong, that called for a ban on abortion, and that addressed prohibiting taxpayer funding of abortion. In contrast, most statements coded as “Pro-Reproductive Health” emphasized protecting the right to abortion. Some also mentioned protecting funding for family planning. Statements about pre and post-natal care were also included as “Pro-Reproductive Health” instead of “Health Issues” if they were accompanied by statements about broader reproductive health issues.

The “Anti-Violence” Category included statements about domestic violence and sexual assault, which included many mentions of VAWA and several statements on providing guidance and resources on tribal lands. Candidates shared accomplishments in funding victim services and law enforcement as well as in developing greater penalties for offenders. One candidate discussed the FACE (Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances) Act in his anti-violence statement, so that was included as well. A few candidates with legal backgrounds talked about specific accomplishments related to prosecuting these crimes.

“Work Issues” included statements in favor of equal pay, support for women business owners, support for women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers,
access to higher education, support of FMLA and/or paid maternity leave, and childcare (if framed as a women’s issue by the candidate). Several statements mentioned the ERA and workplace discrimination.

Statements on “International Women’s Issues” included referencing the International Violence Against Women Act and human trafficking, voicing concern about a lack of opportunities for Afghan women, concern about the impact of AIDS, child marriage, discrimination against girls in education, support for international family planning, and the establishment of an International Women’s Day.

The “Discrimination” issue area included statements in favor of equal opportunity and in opposition to gender/sex-based discrimination. Statements that were specific and limited to issues of discrimination against women at work were included with the “Work Issues” category rather than the discrimination category.

Statements on Social Security were only included if the candidate framed it as a women’s issue. Candidates who included this issue talked about women as the majority of Social Security recipients and discussed how Social Security shielded women and children from poverty.

Finally, statements about Women in the Military largely focused on responding to the healthcare needs of women veterans.

**Categories- LGBTQ Issues**

Statements about “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” include that the policy is “discriminatory,” “unfair,” or “counterproductive.” Some explicitly stated that individuals should be able to serve in the military regardless of their sexualities while others simply called for repeal without referencing a replacement policy.

The “Traditional Marriage” category included support for specific “marriage protection”
legislation, but also included less-specific statements about protecting traditional marriage or marriage between a man and a woman. In contrast, statements were included in the “Marriage Equality” category if they condemned or called for repeals of “marriage protection legislation” or if they made positive statements about marriage equality.

The “Hate Crimes” category focused on specific calls for hate crimes legislation. The “Discrimination” category was broader and included efforts to eliminate discrimination and bullying in schools and beyond.

**Specificity**
Promises that were coded as specific either provided reference to specific bills or provided enough detail for readers to understand what types of bills the Senator would support on the topic and what types they may not. A promise could be specific, but not detailed if it cited action on a specific bill but did not discuss the issue further. Sulkin (2011) found that specificity had a mixed impact, but it was actually negatively correlated with follow-through on moral issues in the House of Representatives. The hypothesis that specificity would lead to greater follow-through on these issues (H6) is based on the idea that these issues are already a marginal part of most campaigns, and that this study looks not just at the percentage of time spent on each issue, but instead, consistency in issue positions. Specificity, then, signals some knowledge of the issues and commitment to support particular related actions.

| Specific: “Equality in the Military: Senator Boxer believes that gay men and lesbians should be able to serve their country openly in the military. In 1993, she authored the amendment in the Senate that would have stopped ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ from being written into law, and she continues to support efforts to overturn this discriminatory policy.” Barbara Boxer, 2010 |
| Not specific: “Senator Menendez supports marriage equality so committed gay couples get the same rights and benefits as all other couples, because it’s a matter of fundamental fairness whose time has come.” Bob Menendez, 2012 |
Table 3. Frequency of Promise Specificity by Topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Not Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Abortion</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reproductive Health</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Issues</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Violence</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Issues</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Women’s Issues</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (Women)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Social Security</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Military</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-DADT</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Marriage</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Hate Crimes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (LGBTQ)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Marriage Equality</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Frame**

The frame through which a promise is made helps the reader understand the candidate’s position and argument. It is possible that a candidate includes multiple frames or perspectives in one promise, but many candidates did anchor their arguments in a single frame. Moral arguments appeal to readers’ values, mention the candidate’s values, and/or cite religious arguments. Legal arguments cite existing law relevant to the topic of discussion. Logical arguments cite research, or discuss effectiveness, cost savings, etc. As expected, moral arguments were the most prevalent on these topics followed by legal arguments, then logical arguments. Eleven of the 276 promises used multiple frames.
Moral Example: “Our social morals and values define us as human beings and as a nation. As a life-long Methodist, the grandson of Swedish immigrants, a father, a grandfather and a Sunday School teacher of 30 years, I hold my values and the true importance of our nation’s many freedoms very close to my heart. I have co-sponsored the Marriage Protection Amendment because I believe it is important for the sanctity of marriage and for the laws of this country that we have a seamless definition of marriage, and the only way to do that is to establish one in the Constitution.” Johnny Isakson, 2010.

Legal Example: “Supporting Choice and Reproductive Rights. I will fight to protect a woman’s right to choose and ensure that abortion remains safe, legal and rare. My understanding of the importance of this right was reinforced by my experience as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun. As Connecticut’s Attorney General, I have strongly and consistently opposed measures infringing upon women’s reproductive rights.” Richard Blumenthal, 2010

Logical: “Striving to Increase Wages, Benefiting Both Women and Their Families
• Even in 1997, studies show that women who work full-time are paid only 72 cents for every dollar men earn. Even more shocking, studies show that if working mothers were paid equal to men, the poverty rate of their families would be cut in half. To combat both these discriminatory practices and the poverty this discrimination can cause, Max worked hard to enact new legislation for the 21st Century. This law, the Paycheck Fairness Act, ensures that women are paid the same amount as their male counterparts for performing the same tasks, which benefits not only them, but their families as well.

Ensuring Women Fair Treatment in the Workplace and Equal Access to Higher Education
• Max cosponsored the 1999 Paycheck Fairness Act, which amended the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide more effective remedies to women who, due to their gender, have been paid insufficient wages.
• As part of the Fair Labor Act, Max granted more money to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which enforces laws banning employment discrimination.
• In 1999 and 2000, Max received a 100 percent approval rating from the American Association of University Women, an organization that promotes equity and education for women and girls.” Max Baucus, 2002

Table 4. Frequency of Promise Frames by Topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Moral</th>
<th>Legal</th>
<th>Logical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Abortion</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reproductive Health</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Issues</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Violence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Issues</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Women’s Issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Past/Future Orientation

Sulkin found that overall, reference to past or future actions had no significant effect on follow-through. There was a correlation between reference to past actions and follow-through on moral issues in the House, but the relationship was negative and minimal. Twenty-six of the 276 promises mentioned both past actions and future intentions and were, thus, coded as both past- and future-oriented.

Past: “He has secured funding to make sure uninsured women diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer get the treatment they need.” Sherrod Brown, 2006

Future: “As we fight the war on terror, America must continue to support efforts to rebuild Afghanistan, provide hope and equality for Afghan women, and focus on opportunities for the developing world.
- Believes that we must increase foreign assistance to combat AIDS across the globe, educate all children and end discrimination against girls in education, establish a world school lunch program so that children will not have to choose between receiving an education and their next meal.” Mary Landrieu, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Abortion</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reproductive Health</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Issues</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Promise Past/Future Orientation by Topic
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-Violence</th>
<th>36</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Issues</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Women’s Issues</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (Women)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Social Security</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Military</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-DADT</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Marriage</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Anti-Hate Crimes</td>
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<td>Anti-Discrimination (LGBTQ)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Marriage Equality</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reference to Self/Opponent**

Sulkin (2011) hypothesized that references candidates made to themselves would correspond to higher rates of follow-through compared to statements that referenced an opponent. She found that “appeals that attack an opponent on an issue provide less information about candidates’ legislative priorities than claims they make about themselves” (Sulkin, p. 71). Most candidates in this study also focused on their own values, preferences, and actions, but candidates did, on occasion, reference their opponents’ values, preferences, or actions. Seven of the 276 promises included both a reference to the candidate’s self and opponent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self: “Fighting for Veteran’s Families. Michael introduced a new law ensuring military families are eligible for benefits like the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplementary program, even if the family is receiving combat pay.” Michael Bennett, 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opponent: Tim Michels opposes a woman's right to choose in all instances even if a woman is raped or if her life is in danger.” Russ Feingold, 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Promise References to Self/Opponent by Topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Abortion</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reproductive Health</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Issues</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Violence</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Issues</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Women’s Issues</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (Women)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Social Security</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Military</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-DADT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Marriage</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Hate Crimes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (LGBTQ)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Marriage Equality</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Word count

Word count is an easy measure of how much a candidate has to say about a given issue.

Part of the appeal of analyzing website content is that the space is nearly limitless, so a candidate is only restricted by their own preferences. Among the included websites, word count varied greatly, with candidates mentioning women’s issues or LGBTQ issues in as few as six words or as many as 2,356. On the high end of the range, Kay Hagan’s website provided campaign-created PDFs available on each issue tab.

Table 7. Promise Word count by Topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Average Word Count</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Abortion</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reproductive Health</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Sponsorship</td>
<td>Votes</td>
<td>Votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Issues</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Violence</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Issues</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>2356</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Women’s Issues</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (Women)</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Social Security</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Military</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-DADT</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Marriage</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Hate Crimes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (LGBTQ)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Marriage Equality</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Promise-keeping Data**

During the period studied, Senators had the opportunity to (co)sponsor legislation on the topics they addressed in their campaigns. The number of bill (co)sponsorships varied greatly across topics and time, with some issues appearing in dozens of bills every session while others only appeared a few times in a couple of sessions. Additionally, within the time period studied, there were several opportunities for Senators to vote on legislation regarding women’s and LGBTQ issues.

The vast majority of Senators who made a commitment in the campaign stage (co)sponsored relevant legislation in the following session and/or term and voted in a manner consistent with their commitments. Table 8 illustrates the total number of (co)sponsorships per year by issue among all members of Congress who had websites.
Table 8. Total (Co)Sponsorships Per Session by Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>109</th>
<th>110</th>
<th>111</th>
<th>112</th>
<th>113</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Violence</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Military</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Abortion</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reproductive Health</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Other Health</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (Women)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Discrimination (LGBTQ)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Work Issues</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Women's Issues</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Traditional Marriage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Marriage Equality</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Don't Ask, Don't Tell</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings in Initial Analyses

Promise Making

Binary Logistic Regression was used to determine whether a candidate’s seat status was a statistically significant predictor of promise making on women’s and LGBTQ issues, with each umbrella issue category examined separately. Hypothesis 1 predicted that candidates in open races or opposing incumbents would be more likely to make promises. The results were not statistically significant (Sig.=.407).

Candidate gender and party do have a statistically significantly, yet small, effect on promise making on women’s issues, as determined by a multiple regression, F(2,121)=7.466,
p=.001. In this model, Adjusted $R^2$ for the overall model was 9.5%. In the model, women candidates are associated with an increase of .702 women’s issues as compared to their male counterparts (p=.036) and Democrats are associated with an increase of .667 women’s issues as compared to their Republican counterparts (p=.006). Hypothesis 5 predicted that female Senators would be more likely to make and keep campaign promises on women’s issues.

Similarly, candidate gender and party also have a statistically significant, yet small, effect on promise making on LGBTQ issues, $F(2,121)=6.184$, $p=.003$. Adjusted $R^2$ for the model was 7.8%. In the model, women candidates are associated with an increase of .420 LGBTQ issues as compared to their male counterparts (p=.022) and Democrats are associated with an increase of .286 LGBTQ issues as compared to their Republican counterparts (p=.031).

As mentioned previously, during the time period studied, there was steady growth in representation of LGBTQ issues (as a percentage of available websites), but women’s issues did not appear to increase over time (even as a percentage of available websites) as expected in hypothesis 2. A chi-square test was used to determine whether mentions of women’s and LGBTQ issues increased on candidate websites as the issues became more prevalent within the period, specifically in 2004, 2006, and 2008. The results were not statistically significant, $X^2 (4, N = 934) = 2.6969$, $p > .05$. This means that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and the variation in mentions of these issues across time could be due to chance.

**Characteristics of Promises**

Binary logistic regression and multiple regression were used to determine whether candidate characteristics (party, gender, and seat status) could predict the types of promises that candidates would make.

In the model predicting promise length, only incumbency status was statistically
significant, \( F(1,248) = 5.633, p = .018 \). Adjusted \( R^2 \) for the model including only incumbency status was just 1.8%. In the model, non-incumbents are associated with an increase of 43.325 additional words in the length of their promises as compared to their incumbent counterparts.

A model predicting the likelihood of using moral framing for a promise revealed that party was the only statistically significant predictor, \( \chi^2(1) = 11.943, p = .001 \). Party explained just 6.6% (Nagelkerke \( R^2 \)) of the variance in moral/non-moral framing and correctly classified 65.6% of cases. Republicans had 2.7 times higher odds of framing their promises in moral language compared to their Democratic counterparts. There were no statistically significant predictors of logical or legal frames of promises.

**Promise-keeping**

The overall rate of promise-keeping was assessed two ways. First, a rate of promise-keeping was established using consistent voting as the standard. Using this measure, less than 2% of all promises were broken. The second, higher, standard of promise-keeping required that if a candidate made a promise and was elected, they should (co)sponsor some related legislation (excluding resolutions) during the term that follows. Using this standard, 16% of promises were broken.

Binary logistic regression was utilized to determine whether Senators who made promises on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues during their campaigns were more likely to take action on corresponding issues than their counterparts who did not make promises, as predicted in hypothesis 4. The test revealed that having made a promise on an issue does have a statistically significant impact on acting on an issue in the following term. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, \( \chi^2(4) = 367.715, p < .0005 \). The model included whether a promise was made, as well as candidate gender and party, and explained 22.7% (Nagelkerke \( R^2 \))
of the variance in action of LGBTQ and women’s issues and correctly classified 68.8% of cases. Having made a promise corresponded to 5.726 times higher odds of action on an issue in the following term.

Additionally, a multiple regression was used to determine whether promise making, candidate characteristics, and/or promise characteristics would be useful in predicting the number of actions that would be taken on an issue in the following term. In the regression, promise making, candidate party and gender, and seat status all have a statistically significant, yet small, effect on promise-keeping on women’s and LGBTQ issues considered together, F(4,1962)=100.997, p<.0005. Adjusted R^2 for the model was 16.9%. In the model, women candidates are associated with an increase of .732 issue actions as compared to their male counterparts (p<.0005) and Democrats are associated with an increase of .687 issue actions as compared to their Republican counterparts (p<.0005). Having made a promise was associated with the largest increase in issue actions, with a 1.313 issue action increase compared to actions with no corresponding promise (p<.0005). Non-incumbent candidates (challengers or those running for open seats) took action on women’s and LGBTQ issues at a slightly higher rate, with the regression reflecting a .2 issue action increase over incumbents.

To explore whether characteristics of promises are useful in predicting promise-keeping actions, a dataset of promises and actions was analyzed. A binary logistic regression revealed that promise-keeping frames, promise length, and specificity were not statistically significant predictors of whether promises would turn into action. A multiple regression was also used to assess whether characteristics of promises could be used to predict the number of promise-keeping actions that would follow. Again, the results were not statistically significant.
Summary
This chapter has described the corpus of promises and the promise-keeping actions included quantitatively and through provision of examples. These excerpts from candidate websites and frequencies of issue and characteristic appearances allow readers to begin to develop a sense of the corpus of promises analyzed. The chapter has also provided the initial results of statistical tests. Chapter 5 will make meaning of those results and place the results of quantitative analyses in conversation with the results of qualititative analyses.

CHAPTER 5: Analysis and Synthesis

Introduction
This chapter will provide an exploration of the promises candidates made and the corresponding actions that they took to answer the established research questions. Additionally, the results of statistical analyses described in Chapter 4 will be discussed in relation to the hypotheses established in Chapter 3. First, relevant trends among promises within the dataset are discussed. Then, the rate of promise-keeping on LGBTQ issues and women’s issues among Senators in the 109th-113th Congresses is explored. This includes not only comparing coded promises to actions, but also examining promise-action combinations that appear “broken” to determine if the promise-action combination actually constitutes a broken promise. This examination considers the corpus of promises as the entire dataset and is, thus, unable to compare promises on LGBTQ issues and women’s issues to promises on other issues.

Promises Made
This study included two hypotheses specifically addressing who would make promises and how. This included predictions regarding members with different incumbency statuses, genders, and parties. Beyond those hypotheses, additional trends were apparent in the data and
were included in analyses. The outcomes of those analyses are discussed here and placed in context.

**Party and Promise Making**
Airne and Benoit (2005) note that Democratic candidates discuss policy significantly more in television ads than do their Republican counterparts. They suggest that this may be a result of a narrower understanding of the range of areas in which government should engage (p. 490). The results here confirm that finding in this limited area of issues. As revealed in the previous chapter, party was a statistically significant predictor of promise making, with Democratic candidates being more likely to make promises related to women’s issues and LGBTQ issues.

**Incumbency, Promise Making, and Specificity**
Hypothesis 1 suggested that candidates in open races or those opposing an incumbent would be more likely to assert an issue position and to use more specific language on their website than incumbents. Because the dataset was created by looking at the websites of Senators who served in office during a set time period and incumbents have high re-election rates, the majority of the candidates (117/172) whose websites were examined were incumbents. Forty-one candidates in the dataset were vying for open seats and a mere 14 candidates were challengers. One candidate, Tim Scott was appointed to the U.S. Senate in 2013, after serving in the U.S. House of Representatives. Senator Scott’s House campaign website was included in the promise-keeping portion of this analysis, but was left out here because his campaign was not a Senate campaign and is, thus, not directly comparable to the others in the dataset.

Among candidates running for open seats in the dataset, 78 percent addressed at least one issue related to women or LGBTQ individuals. Among challengers, 71 percent addressed one or
more issue. As anticipated, incumbents were the least likely group to make promises, with only 60 percent addressing women’s or LGBTQ issues. However, the observed frequency of promise-making in each seat status category did not differ significantly from what would be expected in a random distribution, $X^2(2, N=171)=2.86$, $p < 0.05$. The critical $X^2$ (0.05, 2) was 5.99. Therefore, the variation could be explained by chance alone, so the null hypothesis, that there is no significant difference in promise making on these issues among candidates of various seat statuses, cannot be rejected.

While promise making rate comparisons among incumbents, challengers, and those running for open seats were consistent with expectations, though not significant, predictions of specificity were not consistent with findings, even at first glance. The candidates most likely to make specific promises within the dataset were those competing for open seats (82 percent of promises were specific), followed by incumbents (76 percent of promises were specific). In this dataset, challengers were the least likely to make specific promises (64 percent of promises were specific). The observed frequency of specificity of promises in each seat status category did not differ significantly from what would be expected in a random distribution, $X^2(2, N=272)=0.81$, $p < 0.05$. The critical $X^2$ (0.05, 2) was 5.99. Therefore, the variation could be explained by chance alone, so the null hypothesis, that there is no significant difference in specificity of promises made on these issues among candidates of various seat statuses, cannot be rejected.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that as women’s and LGBTQ organizations grow and provide greater numbers of endorsements and more funding, candidate websites would be more likely to include issue positions and to include more specific discussion on these topics. This hypothesis could not be proven using this dataset. While mention of LGBTQ issues appeared to increase
over the period studied, the same was not true of women’s issues and neither set of issues grew in a statistically significant way.

Overall, it seems that there are few meaningful and significant predictors that explain Senate candidate promise making on women’s and LGBTQ issues. Unsurprisingly, gender and party play a small role, but incumbency did not have a statistically significant effect.

Characteristics of Promises

As revealed in Chapter 4, there were also few statistically significant predictors of the characteristics of promises in the dataset. Incumbency status seemed to have a small impact on the length of promises, with non-incumbents using 43.325 additional words in the length of their promises as compared to their incumbent counterparts. Additionally, party had an impact on the use of moral framing, with Republicans having 2.7 times higher odds of framing their promises in moral language compared to their Democratic counterparts. Though the quantitative analysis of characteristics of promises did not reveal many notable findings, the qualitative content analysis of the corpus of promises revealed several interesting trends.

Content Analysis

As candidates discuss their positions on issues, one would expect to find language of “supporting” and “opposing” ideas, legislation, and other efforts. This held true in the corpus of promises candidates made on their websites. Because these are campaign websites, one would also expect that candidates would attempt to distinguish themselves from their opponents and claim credit for their successes whenever possible. This was also true, with many referencing themselves as “champion[s]” or “vocal” supporters of causes. When incumbents, or individuals who previously held other offices, described their support, they often included that they “voted for,” “introduced,” or “co-sponsored” legislation on the topic. Many candidates also emphasized
serving as an “original co-sponsor” for legislation that had been renewed over years. These credit-claiming efforts are widespread but not universal, as some incumbents or prior office holders made simple statements of positions or beliefs without addressing their prior actions.

While the language of “supporting” and “opposing” was widespread, there were other terms that also appeared heavily in the corpus. Specifically, promises to “defend,” “protect,” and “fight” were abundant throughout the promises (18, 98, and 59 instances, respectively). Some of the language of defending was tied to establishing a legal defense or defending policy, but there were also references to “defend[ing] women’s access to needed healthcare services,” “defending equal opportunity for women and minorities.” and “defend[ing] marriage.” In the context of Senate campaigns, these are ultimately all promises to “defend” through law and policy, but the rhetoric points to defense of broader rights, services, or institutions. The language of protection included “protecting the sanctity of life,” “protect our values,” “protect the rights of [a] community,” and more. Again, these claims seem to extend beyond mere protection of existing law and toward protection of values, rights, and communities as broader concepts. When candidates discussed their willingness to “fight,” it extends to fighting for things like equal pay or the rights of a group (the unborn or women, for instance), and also fighting against “attempts to chip away at women’s rights,” crime, and more. All of this language is likely reflective of the moral and hotly contested nature of many of the issues included in the study. One particularly extreme example of this type of language appeared on Jeff Merkley’s 2008 campaign website, though it did not actually use the terms “protect,” “fight.” or “defend.” Instead, he shares an anecdote:

_Merkley strongly supports marriage equality and will lead the way for equal rights in the U.S. Senate. His efforts in Oregon to legalize civil unions were so fierce that the Republican Speaker Karen Minnis threatened to have state police remove him from the Oregon House chamber in 2005._
Threats of police involvement are not generally something a candidate would put forth as a qualification for office, but in this case Merkley argues that he is willing to take his advocacy efforts to the highest possible level to benefit his constituents.

The language of “protect,” “fight,” and “defend” was prominent. However, not all candidates made strong appeals to one side of an issue. Several discussed there being “difficulty coming to a consensus” on an issue or a desire to work toward finding “common ground.” Statements included that “reasonable people may differ on the question of abortion rights” and that “there are many passionate people on both sides of the debate.” Recognition of the complexity of these issues seems to be an attempt to make their basic positions known while limiting the degree to which they alienate voters on the other side.

Literature on issue framing within campaign rhetoric indicates that candidates can appeal to existing positive associations that voters have with their political parties through repetition of a frame (Arbour, 2014; Entman, 2004). Candidates from one party may use consistent language to achieve these associations. This appears to be the case in this corpus of promises, especially on the issues of abortion and same-sex marriage. Several Republican candidates used the term “culture of life,” while Democrats discussed making abortion “rare” without bans. Similarly, many candidates discussed the “sanctity of marriage.” These terms go a step further than simply declaring a pro-life/pro-choice or traditional marriage/marriage equality stance. These phrases convey values and tie the candidates to one another and to their party.

Another way that campaigns reference their party’s expertise in an issue, or the opposing party’s lack thereof, is to intentionally name prominent political actors in their statements. This was also prevalent in the corpus. There were instances in which a candidate mentioned her own accomplishment on an issue and then went on to reference a President’s actions (unrelated to the
candidate) in the following sentence. This appears to be an effort to tie the candidate’s positions, actions, and perhaps even fate, to that of a political figure with high approval ratings in the state. Another candidate mentioned that he “strongly support[s]” the president’s view on an issue. Here again, mention of the president hardly clarifies the candidate’s position as he continues on describing his support of the issue for 11 additional bullet points. The mention, then, seems to be a direct effort to associate the campaign with a president who is popular in the state.

The final notable trend within the corpus seems to be candidates referencing their own families on these topics that are tied to values and family issues. This included referencing generations of family with shared values in the state, referencing daughters as a qualifier for understanding the need for equity for women, framing support for expanded women’s health care in relation to a personal account of labor and delivery, and referencing a long marriage as a qualifier for commitment to “traditional marriage,” among others.

As Weber mentions, content analysis can “reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional, or societal attention” (Weber, 1990, p. 9). Analysis of promises appearing on the websites of winning Senate candidates during the period studied did reveal the focus of the individual candidates, but also the incoming class of Senators, and, at some point, all serving Senators (save those whose websites were not properly archived). In addition to the trends in rhetoric and framing, the focus of the promises themselves is of interest. Within the two umbrella categories of women’s issues and LGBTQ issues, a variety of smaller issues appeared. As shown in Table 2, Issue Frequency, marriage equality was the most prominent LGBTQ issue, but hate crimes and discrimination also appeared, with a good number of candidates expressing concern over the discriminatory effects of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell in the cycles after its passage. Abortion was the most discussed women’s issue, but other health issues, concerns about violence, and
calls for more equity in the workforce were also substantial.

**Promises Kept**

Overall, in this examination of promise-keeping on women’s and LGBTQ issues, instances of promise-keeping, or consistent action, were prevalent. Initial review of promise-keeping based on voting revealed 210 instances of consistent voting and 18 instances of inconsistent voting, but as I will discuss later, only four of those instances were truly inconsistent enough to be called “broken promises.” Because not all issues on which candidates made promise were up for votes in the following sessions, the closest approximation of a promise-keeping rate is the rate of consistent actions compared to inconsistent actions, or 224:4. That equates to fewer than 2% of votes being inconsistent with the promises made, or 98% of votes being consistent with promises.

In the period studied, Senators (co)sponsored 6,042 bills that met the criteria for inclusion, meaning that there was at least a sponsor and one additional co-sponsor and one of the primary functions of the bill is to address women’s and/or LGBTQ issues. Of those (co)sponsorships, 631 corresponded to a women’s or LGBTQ issue promise in the dataset, made in the Senator’s previous campaign. Some of the (co)sponsorships corresponded to the same promise (i.e. a Senator who made an anti-violence promise (co)sponsored 3 bills on the topic), so the total number of kept promises was 202. In examining (co)sponsorships as promise-keeping, failure to (co)sponsor a related bill in the following term is considered a broken promise. Among the Senators who had full terms during the period studied, 32 Senators broke 39 promises. This equates to 16% of all promises included in the analysis.

Hypothesis 3 stated that Senators who made promises in regard to women’s or LGBTQ issues on their websites will keep their promises in the following sessions/terms at a high rate.
This study has provided evidence in support of this hypothesis. When Sulkin (2011) examined references to specific issue positions rather than broader agendas, she found that “in the Senate, 76 percent of legislators engaged in at least one introduction on defense that corresponded to the content of their appeal, and the same holds true for 70 percent of legislators for the environment” (p. 103). Introductions are “a more stringent assessment of follow-through” (Sulkin, p. 103) than co-sponsorships, so the higher (co)sponsorship rates found here are not a surprise. Instead, they are consistent with expectations. Ringquist, Neshkova, and Aamidor (2013) found that, during the period they studied (1993-2004), House members defected on their promises on environmental issues 31 percent of the time and Senators defected 41 percent of the time (p. 371). The promise-keeping rates revealed here are much higher than those found by Ringquist, Neshkova, and Aamidor, especially considering they used roll call votes (a less stringent measure) to determine rates of defection. Overall, the promise-keeping rate is higher than other examples from literature and higher than expected.

**Examples**

What might a kept promise look like? There were 18 Senators in the dataset who served in the 111th Congress and made anti-violence commitments during their campaigns. In the 111th Congress, there were nine bills introduced that directly addressed anti-violence efforts in ways that were consistent with how candidates framed anti-violence as a women’s issue. The 18 Senators who made anti-violence promises each (co)sponsored between 0 and 4 anti-violence bills in the session. Eleven introduced at least one bill that session, and many of those who failed to sponsor an anti-violence bill in that particular session did sponsor a related bill in another session during the same term. Jeff Bingaman’s (D-NM) website said:

*Fighting Domestic Violence*

*Senator Bingaman worked to secure $494,364 in funding for the*
**Somos Familia Institute** to help fight domestic violence in the counties of Guadalupe, Mora and San Miguel. These funds provide violence prevention and victim services.

*Providing Domestic Violence Treatment & Prevention in Northern New Mexico*

Senator Bingaman secured $300,000 for the Santa Fe Rape Crisis Center to provide domestic violence treatment and prevention center in Northern New Mexico.

In the 111th Congress, Bingaman (co)sponsored S.2982. the International Violence Against Women Act.

Similarly, Arlen Specter (R-PA) included the following statement on his website:

*Senator Specter, an original co-sponsor, has strongly supported the ‘Violence Against Women Act,’ which increases penalties for sexual assaults and funds programs to protect and assist abused women. Senator Specter has secured funding for the Pennsylvania S*T*O*P Violence Against Women program, which helps women who fall victim to violent crimes and demonstrates community support for them.*

In the 111th Congress, Specter also (co)sponsored S.2982. The International Violence Against Women Act, as well as S.2736, the Justice for Survivors of Sexual Assault Act of 2009. In both of these instances, candidates made promises on the issue of anti-violence and delivered anti-violence legislation in the following term.

Another example can be seen in the 113th Congress on the issue of LGBTQ anti-discrimination. Ten Senators included in the dataset made promises on the issue of LGBTQ anti-discrimination. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) included:

*Jeff Merkley has publicly stood tall above the crowd, not just when election time rolls around, advocating for the fair and equal treatment of all Americans. He will do the same in the U.S. Senate.*

*Merkley will also champion reforms like the landmark bill that banned discrimination based on sexual orientation.*

*Merkley will continue the fight to end unfair and unjust discrimination in America. Jeff Merkley's actions and beliefs consistently support his strong public record against denying any person a job, housing, healthcare, education or a seat in a public restaurant solely based upon the sexual orientation or gender identity of any person.*
Then, in the 113th Congress, Merkley voted in favor of S.815, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2013. In this case, the bill had 56 (co)sponsors, but Merkley was not among them. This demonstrates the importance of including multiple measures of promise-keeping to credit Senators for even the smallest actions they took that could constitute promise-keeping, but also to distinguish those who take the more intensive actions of (co)sponsorship. In this study, two measures were used, votes and (co)sponsorships, but there are other measures that could be introduced in future studies.

**Promises Broken- Votes**

An initial analysis of voting records on bills regarding women’s and LGBTQ issues revealed 18 broken promises. In these instances, a Senator voted in a manner that was inconsistent with the promise they made in the prior campaign. Upon further inquiry, it was clear that only four of these inconsistent actions were inconsistent enough with the language on the websites to truly be classified as broken promises; the others were votes that were simply outside of the scope of the promises made. To understand why it would appear that Senators broke a promise that they did not, or why Senators might have broken a promise more explicitly, it would be prudent to explore the candidates’ statements and the corresponding legislation.

Among the “broken” promises that were actually outside of the scope, the majority (13) were on the topic of abortion. Senators Byrd and Murkowski both made statements that included traditional anti-abortion rhetoric and were, thus, coded as anti-abortion. Senator Byrd wrote, “I support legislation requiring parental notification when minors seek an abortion. Young women need guidance from their parents or guardians who have their best interests at heart. Such difficult decisions are life-altering, and may carry extraordinary consequences.” Senator
Murkowski had a three-point statement:

**FACT:** Senator Murkowski OPPOSES public funding for abortion.
Senator Murkowski opposes using taxpayer funds for abortion except in the rare cases of rape, incest or to protect the life of the mother. She is working to provide more options to parents including sponsoring S. 2316, a bill to allow couples to withdraw money from their IRAs without penalty to cover the high cost of adoption.

**FACT:** Senator Murkowski CO-SPONSORED the ban on partial birth abortion.
Senator Murkowski opposes using taxpayer funds for abortion except in the rare cases of rape, incest or to protect the life of the mother. She is working to provide more options to parents including sponsoring S. 2316, a bill to allow couples to withdraw money from their IRAs without penalty to cover the high cost of adoption.

**FACT:** Senator Murkowski is CO-SPONSORING legislation to ban cloning of embryos.
Senator Murkowski is co-sponsoring S. 245, a bill to prevent the cloning of human embryos.

In reality, it seems that the statements by both Senators, Byrd and Murkowski, were limited and their positions may be more nuanced. Comparisons of statements and actions by these two Senators account for eight of the 18 initial “broken” promises. Similarly, Senator Cornyn made a broad statement calling for “Expanded access to healthcare services for children, pregnant women, undocumented immigrants, in rural areas and other underserved communities.” This statement in support of “expanded access to healthcare services for… pregnant women” was coded as pro-reproductive health, but did not specifically mention abortion. The language used is more consistent with pro-choice rhetoric than anti-abortion rhetoric but is not specific and his position, like those of Senators Byrd and Murkowski, may be more nuanced. Senator Cornyn’s statement/action comparisons account for three of the 18 initial “broken” promises, bringing the total of “false positives” among these three Senators to 11 of the 18 broken promises.

Two additional “broken” promises on abortion related votes corresponded to S. Amdt. 3896 to S. Amdt. 3899 to S.1200 or, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act Amendments of
2008. This amendment, introduced by Senator Vitter sought to codify language “ensuring that Indian Health Service funds will not be used for abortion” (FRC Congressional Scorecard, 110th Congress). Two Senators whose statements had been marked pro-reproductive health voted for this amendment. Senator Ken Salazar wrote:

Abortion – I believe the decision to have an abortion should be between a woman and her God. I will defend that Constitutional right. But I hope that we can work together as a nation to find common ground that makes abortions rare, by providing the best information about and access to healthcare, and by teaching our children the life skills to make good choices.

I do not support mandatory waiting periods, spousal consent, biased counseling requirements or other extreme limits on abortion rights. I do support parental notification, with appropriate bypass procedures, and bans on late term abortions, except when necessary to protect the life or health of the mother.

This statement does not address funding specifically, so while his statements were generally supportive of choice, the vote was not in direct, explicit contradiction to his statements. Additionally, Senator Tim Johnson included on his “Children and Families” page under “Patient’s Rights” that he wants to “Ensure that women can easily access OB-GYN services.” This was coded as pro-reproductive health, but was one of the most vague statements coded that way and certainly does not directly address abortion, let alone public funding of abortion.

Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) made statements highlighting past achievements supporting the rights of victims of violence, but voted no on the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. On his website, he includes, “Kyl has a long history of supporting victims’ rights. In the 1994 crime bill, Senator Kyl won changes in the federal rules of evidence to allow the admission of evidence of prior sexual offenses in sexual assault cases.” Not only does Senator Kyl address victims’ rights broadly, but he even claims a victory related to sexual assault, a form of gender-based violence, specifically. This does seem to constitute a broken promise.

Senator David Vitter (R-LA) expressed pro-work sentiments on his website but voted
Nay on the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 (S. 181). While Senator Vitter did not make an explicit statement in favor of pay equity for women, his statements were very supportive of women in business, so it does seem inconsistent that he would vote against S. 181.

From Senator Vitter’s campaign website:

More than 10 million American women own their own businesses, and women are opening businesses at twice the rate of men. So whether it’s rearing children, building or expanding businesses, volunteering for nonprofits, or caring for aging parents, Louisiana women are at the forefront of life’s most important work.

- Streamline regulations and reduce paperwork to ensure that federal regulations don’t handicap new entrepreneurs, most of whom are women.
- Fight for a tax code that helps women business owners grow jobs.

Work to make flextime and comp time more available in the workplace through voluntary measures. These policies give women workers the time they need to handle other crucial duties and challenges in their lives.

Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) shared pro-traditional marriage sentiments on his website but voted Nay on the DC Marriage Referendum and Yes on the Hutchison Amendment to the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. The DC Marriage Referendum would have allowed DC voters to determine the future of same sex marriage in the District and would have prevented the city from issuing additional marriage licenses to same sex couples in the meantime. The Hutchison Amendment served to strike “key provisions prohibiting discrimination against, and expanding services to, victims of domestic violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity” from the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (HRC Congressional Scorecard). From Senator Nelson’s campaign website, “Ben has worked to preserve family values across Nebraska, and supports traditional marriage.” These votes do seem to be inconsistent with a broadly stated “traditional marriage” stance, though the promise in this case was fairly vague. With one other exception on the DC Marriage Referendum, all other pro-traditional marriage candidates who were elected to the Senate did vote in favor of this legislation.
Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) also supports traditional marriage but voted Nay on the DC Marriage Referendum. From Senator Lincoln’s campaign website:

_I oppose same sex marriages. In fact, I have stated that I will vote for the Arkansas constitutional amendment, which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, when it is on the ballot this November. Marriage is a sacred bond between a man and a woman which is consistent with my faith and religious beliefs as a Christian. I am proud of the strong laws on the books in Arkansas that limit marriage between a man and a woman and am confident those laws will withstand any potential legal challenges in the future._

_I also support federal law which empowers states to refuse to recognize marriages from other states. I do not support amending the federal Constitution on this issue because I believe the laws on the books are sufficient and that a Constitutional amendment should be a last resort. Marriage is a question that should be addressed by individual states as it has been since our nation was founded. Arkansas’s traditional definition of marriage has not been challenged. However, if state law is seriously challenged by a judge, local legislative body, or public official, you can be certain that I will reconsider the question of a federal Constitutional amendment._

Senator Lincoln’s Nay is, perhaps, justified given her stated support of marriage being “addressed by individual states as it has been since our nation was founded.” If leadership of the municipality, where there is no state, decided to award marriage certificates, Senator Lincoln’s stated position is not in direct opposition to allowing them to do so.

The 3 Senators (Kyl, Vitter, and Nelson) who were responsible for the 4 broken promises uncovered in this study may not have voted consistent with the positions they put forth during their campaigns, but they did vote with the majority of their party on these legislative items. While there is not enough variability in promise-keeping, using this measure, to perform much statistical analysis, the fact that all four of these broken promises occurred in conditions of Senators taking positions contrary to their parties’ positions is notable. Overall, Senators kept their promises on the vast majority (98 percent) of women’s and LGBTQ issues in the 109th-113th Congresses as they voted.
Promises Broken- (Co)Sponsorships

In addition to comparing promises with voting behavior, there was also an opportunity to compare promises with (co)sponsorships in the following term. It stands to reason that if a candidate makes a promise in their campaign, they ought to sponsor at least one related bill in the following session or term. As discussed in Chapter 4, having made a promise corresponded to 5.726 times higher odds of action on an issue in the following term. Nonetheless, this comparison yielded a higher rate of promise breaking than the voting comparison, with 16% of promises, 39 total, broken based on inaction. There were 32 different Senators who did not take action on one of issues that they had addressed in a promise. All but three of these Senators did take action on other promises they had made. Twenty-two of the broken promises were made by Republicans while 17 were made by Democrats. Twenty-eight were made by Senators who are men while 11 were made by women. Twenty-six were made by incumbents, 10 by candidates who ran for open seats, and three challengers. There were no characteristics of promises that were statistically significantly correlated with higher or lower rates of promise-keeping activity.

Specificity and Promise-keeping

The hypothesis that specificity would lead to greater follow-through on these issues (H6) was based on the idea that these issues are already a marginal part of most campaigns, and that this study looks not just at the percentage of time spent on each issue, but instead, consistency in issue positions. Specificity, then, signals some knowledge of the issues and commitment to support particular related actions. A binary logistic regression revealed that specificity could not, in a statistically significant way, predict whether a promise would be kept. Additionally, a multiple regression revealed that promise specificity could not, in a statistically significant way, predict the number of (co)sponsorships a Senator would produce on a particular topic.
**Promise Making, Length, and Promise-keeping**

Hypothesis 7 predicted that Senators who made campaign promises, and those who make promises of greater length, will be more likely to keep those promises once elected as compared to Senators who made no promises and Senators who made shorter promises. The rationale for this hypothesis was that if an individual bothered to address an issue in a campaign, they are more invested in the issue than counterparts who made no commitments on the issue. Additionally, if they crafted a longer promise, that could convey greater interest in the topic and a greater vision for possible legislation. The range and variation in word count on women’s and LGBTQ issues (ranging from 6 to 2,356 words per promise) served as a hopeful early indicator for the hypothesis. However, a binary logistic regression revealed that the length of promises could not, in a statistically significant way, predict whether promises would be kept. Additionally, a multiple regression revealed that promise length could not, in a statistically significant way, predict the number of (co)sponsorships a Senator would produce on a particular topic.

Hypothesis 4 stated that Senators who made promises in regard to women’s or LGBTQ issues on their websites would be more likely to (co)sponsor legislation on corresponding issues than their counterparts who opted not to make such promises. Binary logistic regression was utilized to determine whether this was the case. The test revealed that having made a promise on an issue does have a statistically significant impact on acting on an issue in the following term. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 367.715$, $p < .0005$. The model included whether a promise was made, as well as candidate gender and party, and explained 22.7% (Nagelkerke $R^2$) of the variance in action of LGBTQ and women’s issues and correctly classified 68.8% of cases. Having made a promise corresponded to 5.726 times higher odds of action on an issue in the following term. This provides evidence in support of the hypothesis that
making a promise on these issues increases the likelihood that Senators will (co)sponsor related legislation.

**Gender, Promise Making, and Promise-keeping**

Hypothesis 5 suggested that female Senators would be more likely to make and keep campaign promises on women’s issues than their male counterparts. The multiple regression referenced in Chapter 4 provided some evidence in support of the hypothesis. In the study, gender had a small, but statistically significant, impact on promise making on both women’s issues and LGBTQ issues in the study.

**Summary**

Overall, there were mixed results with regard to the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3. There was some evidence that women and Democrats make more promises on these topics, that non-incumbents make longer promises, and that Republicans utilize moral framing more than Democrats. There were not, however, significant results in many of the areas expected, including in using characteristics of candidates or promises to predict promise-keeping rates. The overall promise-keeping rates were high, as expected, so the study can provide additional evidence that Senators who make promises are likely to follow through on them.

**CHAPTER 6: Conclusions**

This chapter attempts to investigate the meaning of the findings outlined in the previous chapter. This includes situating the findings about the promises themselves and the promise-keeping rate within the context of political science and politics. Additionally, I will place the findings in conversation with democratic theories of representation. Finally, I will explore what future research on related topics might look like.
Review of Key Findings

This study produced several findings regarding what Senate candidates’ promises on women’s and LGBTQ issues looked like in elections leading up to the 109th-113th Congresses (2005-2014). This includes findings that resulted from the quantitative analysis such as the longer promises made by non-incumbents and the increased moral framing among Republicans compared to Democrats. The qualitative analysis also produced a few notable results. Candidates’ credit-claiming efforts were widespread on these issues. Candidates also seemed to want to make these issues personal by referencing their own families on these topics that are tied to values and family issues.

The level of assertiveness reflected in the language that candidates used to describe their positions on women’s and LGBTQ issues varied dramatically. The language of “protect,” “fight,” and “defend” was prominent in the corpus of promises. However, many candidates offered recognition of the complexity of these issues, which seems to be an attempt to make their basic positions known while limiting the degree to which they alienate voters on the other side. These contrasting strategies demonstrate the range of options candidates have in developing communications to fit the candidate-constituent issue position dynamics in their state.

Candidates appeared to use consistent issue framing to appeal to existing positive associations that voters have with their political parties (Arbour, 2014; Entman, 2004). Candidates frequently mentioned a “culture of life” and the “sanctity of marriage” (Republicans), and making abortion “rare” without bans (Democrats). These phrases convey values and tie the candidates to one another and to their party. Additionally, candidates mentioned prominent political actors in their statements even when their position and reasoning were not enhanced by doing so. This appears to be an effort to, once again, tie a campaign to the larger party and popular figures.
Additionally, a major finding was a high rate of promise-keeping on women’s and LGBTQ issues. Depending on the measure used, 84-98% of promises on these issues were kept, with the higher rate reflecting consistent voting and the lower rate reflecting the (co)sponsorship of at least one related piece of legislation in the following term.

**What Promise Making and Keeping Means for Representation**

Mansbridge (2009) wrote that voters “must have sufficiently good information at the time of selection about the potential agent’s motivation” (p. 381). In 1958, Miller and Stokes found that voters had incredibly limited communication with or about candidates, relying, instead, on party as the major indicator of policy preferences (Miller and Stokes, 1963). While candidates and elected officials still do tend to split down party lines on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues, there were certainly Senators in the 109th-113th Congresses who broke with their parties on these issues, and even suggested that they would be doing so on their campaign websites. In this way, voters now have websites available as a platform for more accurate representation of candidate policy preferences and at little to no cost. Whether voters choose to access these indicators of policy preferences is outside the scope of this project, but the verification of campaign websites as an accurate representation of candidate positions on women’s issues and LGBTQ issues, available to nearly all Americans, is hopeful. If voters want “sufficiently good information at the time of selection,” it’s at their fingertips.

The “Selection Model” of political representation that Mansbridge (2009) developed asserts that U.S. voters rely largely on a selection model at the core and sanctions on the periphery as they elect representatives. A higher number of candidates included positions on women’s and LGBTQ issues on their websites than initially imagined, revealing that most voters could consider candidate positions on these issues as they selected their Senator. The study did
not include opponent websites, so it is not possible to determine for certain whether candidates offered opposing positions on these issues, but most candidates did offer positions consistent with their party’s platform, on issues that typically have partisan differences. The high levels of promise-keeping observed in this study bode well for the selection model, indicating that sanctions may not be needed often in these issue areas.

**Implications for Political Science**

This study provides support for the growing body of literature that suggests that elected officials in the U.S. keep their promises at relatively high rates. The focus on issues that affect specific sub-populations is a newer perspective among promise-keeping studies. Additionally, many of the issues included were framed in moral terms which provides another interesting angle as compared to previous studies of much broader topics with a wider variety of framing.

The findings here are also relevant to questions of ambiguity and specificity. Of the 172 unique websites included, 110 had content coded as women’s issues, 49 had content coded as LGBTQ issues, providing 276 promises total. The majority of candidates opted to take some position on women’s and/or LGBTQ issues. Nearly 77% of the promises were specific, meaning that they either cited legislation or provided enough detail to provide a good sense of the legislation the candidate would support once elected. It seems that candidates are opting to take some risks in putting forth issue positions rather than enjoying the benefits of ambiguity.

Mayhew (1974) identified three primary tactics legislators use to seek re-election and one of the tactics is very apparent in the promises included in this study. This study provides many clear examples of position taking. Nearly every statement on LGBTQ or women’s issues that appeared on a candidate’s website was an instance of position taking. Some candidates articulated their positions specifically and at length, while others made broad and brief
statements, but when candidates mention gender and sexuality, it was typically done to take a position. Additionally, there are many examples of policy acclaims (Benoit, 2003; Airne and Benoit, 2005) among the promises. Candidates running for re-election and those who had served in other offices before their current campaign often cited their own policy successes in these issue areas as they attempted to demonstrate their commitment and competence on women’s and LGBTQ issues. There were fewer attacks and defenses in the dataset. The presence of these positions and policy claims on candidate websites provides additional examples of these elements of campaign communications.

While this study could not provide statistically significant support for the hypothesis that candidate promises on these issues have increased over time as funding and endorsements have increased, there is evidence that endorsements on these topics is important to candidates. There were at least 15 instances of candidates mentioning their endorsements within the promises they made. Some other candidates listed endorsements separately on their websites. Though this study does not make a direct contribution to the literature on PACs and Advocacy Group Influence, the data does provide support for continued research on the topic.

The use of campaign websites is also a shift compared to prior studies of promise-keeping. Studies have used paid television advertising as a way to limit observations to those issues that were highest priority for candidates. Others have used promises made in surveys rather than promises made publicly. Website promises offer several distinct advantages including that they are easily accessible, they are preserved in the original format that voters would have accessed, and candidates could write as much or as little as they want and organize their thoughts and positions as they see fit. As years pass, new website data will be available in archives, allowing for longitudinal studies of website promises that span greater periods of time.
Additionally, this study speaks back to the larger literature on consistency in promise making and promise-keeping among other types of political entities such as parties. Scholars have studied the consistency of party pledges during elections and the political outcomes that follow for many years. In 2017, a group of 11 scholars came together and standardized their methods to develop a comprehensive study of pledge making and pledge fulfillment in 12 countries, including pledges from 57 election campaigns spanning a 40-year period (Thomson, et al.). The group found that “governing parties fulfilled a clear majority of pledges at least partially: 60%” (p. 536). They did note substantial variation across the different types of governments tracked, with governing parties in single-party executives having the strongest performance, above and beyond parties in coalitions.

With candidate-centered promise-keeping rates in the range of 84-98% in this study, it would appear that candidates keep their promises at a higher rate than parties, but the comparison is complicated by the different standard of measurements. Candidate-centered promise-keeping measures effort rather than outcomes, whereas party-centered analyses are looking for actual legislative outcomes. While it is difficult to compare across these standards, applying either standard to the other entity would produce illogical results. Parties should not be credited for (co)sponsorships when they likely have the authority and ability to pass legislation and Senators should not be faulted for failing to pass legislation when they are often merely one voice among the hundred. What is consistent among the different measures of promise-keeping is substantially better performance than publics tend to imagine.

In the study of pledge fulfillment in 12 countries, the U.S. falls somewhere in the middle of the pack, outperforming most of the coalition governments but coming in behind the single-party parliamentary systems. The authors also note that,
The U.S. case gives many examples of the fact that parties do not necessarily tailor their pledges to foreseeable constraints. Republican party platforms regularly pledge to enact a constitutional amendment banning abortion, while this is unlikely to be fulfilled without winning both the presidency and unrealistically large majorities in both houses. (Thomson, et al., 2017, p. 533)

This is an important note when exclusively considering women’s and LGBTQ issues in an American context. U.S. Senate candidates in this study often made promises that would only be able to become policy in an unlikely, ideal political environment. This, again, speaks to the need to measure promise-keeping differently depending on the actors being studied.

Thomson, et al. found higher rates of pledge fulfillment in times of economic growth and when parties had more time in control. These findings could be consistent with individual legislators’ promise-keeping efforts in the U.S., but this period of study was too brief to tell. This points to the need to study an extended period with distinct economic situations. In this case, extending to include multiple recessions and recovery periods would be useful, as would tracking when in a Senator’s term or tenure a promise-keeping action took place. It seems reasonable that when economic conditions are good, Senators can focus on non-economic promises. That is consistent with advocacy groups’ reflections on the 111th Congress and the early focus on economic recovery efforts. Likewise, it seems reasonable that a sustained period of stable partisan dynamics would allow the party in control to hit their stride and deliver on more promises. This would be a particularly important perspective for researchers considering the rates of delivery on promises like Thomson, et al. do, rather than examining attempts to deliver as examined here.

Another important consideration is how much citizens know about how and whether their representatives fulfill their promises. Thomson and Brandenburg (2019) studied perception and knowledge of promise-keeping in a British context. Similar to American perceptions, they found
that there is widespread distrust of the government, government officials, and individual representatives’ efforts to deliver on promises. However, when asked about specific pledges and whether they have been fulfilled, respondents could, fairly reliably, report the correct answer. Respondents were 6.41 times more likely to identify a pledge as fulfilled if it actually was (Thomson and Brandenburg, 2019, p. 259). Unsurprisingly, respondents who were politically knowledgeable performed better than those who were not, regardless of the framing. How respondents were asked also mattered. Among people who were broadly distrustful of government, framing pledges as “proposals” resulted in higher estimations of fulfillment compared to when they were framed as “promises” (p. 261).

Thomson and Bradenburg use their findings and other literature to discuss trust and distrust as a heuristic. When individuals have incomplete or ambiguous information, those who are distrustful default to assuming betrayal. As this study showed, most pledges or promises are fulfilled, or at least attempted, but those who don’t have sufficient information may rely on stereotypes of politicians as liars or promise-breakers. Thomson and Brandenburg discuss this as a troubling result as I will discuss further in the next section.

**Implications for Politics**

The first finding that has practical implications for politics is the high number of candidates who addressed these issues on their websites. If voters care about these issues, most can simply search for the websites of their candidates and learn of the candidates’ positions from the comfort of their own homes. While candidates have incentive to remain ambiguous in some circumstances, many of them are taking specific positions and making promises on women’s and LGBTQ issues.

The data examined also indicate that this batch of Senators from these particular years
did, overwhelmingly, keep their promises. I expect that this finding would hold beyond this body and these years, but there could be greater variation if additional years or pieces of legislation were included, or if additional sessions or legislative bodies were added. Nonetheless, this preliminary finding is hopeful for voters who depend on candidate promises as part of their vote determination.

In developing the dataset for this study, there were many candidate websites that included no mention of women’s and/or LGBTQ issues. In the end, Senators who had mentioned these issues on their campaign website (co)sponsored more bills on these issues compared to Senators who had not mentioned these issues. It is helpful for voters to understand that early commitments on these issues are meaningful.

As Thomson and Brandenburg (2019) found, individual ability to determine kept and broken promises is greater than indicated by initial assessments of public confidence in promise-keeping among elected officials. However, those with low political knowledge often default to distrust and assuming that promises have been broken. This is a particularly difficult challenge in an American context in which political knowledge has tended to be fairly low. Under a selection model of representation, elected officials do not necessarily require a great deal of monitoring, but voters must invest some effort in learning about candidates and their positions prior to voting and there is a role for some, limited, follow-up on kept and broken promises. This contradiction of citizens having a fair ability to accurately determine whether a promise is kept or broken when pressed, but not generally reporting an overall figure correctly (or even close) initially is certainly a dynamic worth exploring further.

**Future Research Possibilities**

This study included only U.S. Senators but “studying both chambers enables one to
determine how variation in institutional incentives and constraints drive behavior, and also offers
further insight into how representatives and senators manage their dual roles as campaigners and
as policy makers” (Sulkin, 2011, p. 199). A logical next step may be to add U.S. House members
to the analysis, though the results may not differ much. After all, U.S. Senate candidate websites
were the focus of this study, in part because Sulkin (2011) found that “promise-keeping linkages
are very widespread for the House, but are less so for the Senate” (p. 77). To analyze promises
among U.S. House of Representative candidates/members, even for the same time period, much
more extensive data collection and analysis would be necessary. The data set would likely grow
large enough that automated content analysis would become very useful. Using the coding
structure created here could provide a good start for supervised learning. While U.S. Senate
candidate websites are not a random sample of the population, website promises are likely fairly
consistent across chambers due to candidate efforts to frame issues consistently across parties.
The literature suggests 100-500 documents as an adequate sample to code for supervised
learning, so the 276 promises from 172 websites included here would likely suffice (Hopkins and
King, 2010). If the U.S. House promise-keeping rates are similar, or greater than those in the
U.S. Senate, variability in the dependent variable when using consistent voting as a measure will
remain a challenge. Nonetheless, both chambers are taking action on women’s issues and
LGBTQ issues and candidates from both chambers have made promises on these issues, so some
comparative analysis may be fruitful.

Additionally, for each legislator who voted on the included legislation, background
information was collected about the legislator and their district including the legislator’s gender,
state and district, sexual orientation (if listed/referenced on website), party, and incumbent status.
Most of these candidate characteristics did not have statistically significant effects on promise
making and promise-keeping. With a greater number of cases, this data might be able to be used to determine whether these characteristics make a candidate more or less likely to make or keep certain types of campaign promises. Characteristics of the promises themselves (word count, framing, past/future orientation, etc.) were also included and, again, may produce more significant results with a greater number of cases. All of the broken promises revealed here by inconsistent voting were promises made across typical party lines. Would that finding hold with a larger number of cases? Additional information about who keeps promises or how broken promises are framed would provide greater insight into promise-keeping on LGBTQ and women’s issues. The addition of House of Representative Members and/or additional sessions of Congress would create a larger sample to analyze. Of course, gathering enough data to constitute a large enough pool of votes that constitute broken promises for analysis would likely be an extensive and time-consuming endeavor.

Because no other studies have examined promise-keeping using a website/action comparison quite like this, the lack of a true baseline is also a limit. A study replicating the methods used here, but applying them to other topics, could create a baseline of sorts to allow comparison across issue areas. As mentioned before, website promises offer several advantages including that they are easily accessible, they are preserved in the original format that voters would have accessed, and candidates could write as much or as little as they want and organize their thoughts and positions as they see fit.

There is also work to be done in analyzing the language used to address women’s and LGBTQ issues in Senatorial campaigns. The content analysis provided here was just a glimpse, or a single snapshot, into the rhetoric of these topics, yet it revealed several interesting characteristics and trends. There is certainly literature on campaign rhetoric and on rhetoric
surrounding some of the issues addressed here, but there is little on the particular language used to discuss these issues in campaigns. This should be of interest because campaign rhetoric is both a reflection of past and current public discourse and a model for future discourse.

Beyond expanding whose actions are studied or replicating the methods used, it would also be interesting to apply different measures of promise-keeping. This study included a measure of consistent voting and a measure of (co)sponsorship of relevant bills in the following term. A higher standard would be to require (co)sponsorship of relevant bills in the following session or to look only at primary sponsorship rather than co-sponsorship.

Another possible higher standard would be requiring not just action on the topic, but action that matches the promise in a very specific way. In this study, Senators were credited for voting consistently or introducing legislation on the topics they discussed, so long as the general positions were consistent. A higher standard could be developed in which a promise is only counted as “kept” if the details of the legislation match the details of the promise. For instance, some candidates expressed concerns about women’s rights in specific foreign countries on their campaign websites. These promises were coded under the broader category of international women’s issues, so any legislative efforts in the following term that addressed international women’s issues were counted as promise-keeping efforts, even if they addresses international women’s issues more broadly or in different specific countries than the one(s) originally named on the campaign website. Here, the commitment to the broad issue was honored, but requiring the details to match would be a stricter, higher standard of promise-keeping. Like all measurement standards, this too could have its drawbacks, but it would be interesting to determine the rate of promise-keeping on such a detailed level for comparison purposes.

Additionally, Mayhew (1974) poses a question, “We can all point to a good many
instances in which congressmen seem to have gotten in trouble by being on the wrong side in a roll call vote, but who can think of one where a member got into trouble by being on the losing side?” (p. 118). What would promise-keeping look like if passing relevant legislation was the standard? This standard would certainly be the highest of any in the current literature, but successful promotion of a bill through the process is a form of delivering on a promise that is much more meaningful than a simple vote or even a (co)sponsorship. This higher standard may need to be balanced with considerations of elements of the process that are outside any one Senator’s control, but if there is a way to fairly assess true deliverables rather than efforts, it would be a worthwhile effort.

Promise Making and Keeping Today

The time period included in this study was selected based on data availability and the partisan dynamics of the included sessions. During the period, there were two sessions of single party control of the presidency and both chambers of Congress, one Democratic and one Republican, and three sessions of divided government, which means there was potential for a variety of legislative outcomes. Additionally, there were a high number of landmark legislative actions that passed during the period.

However, readers often desire to understand applications to current situations and events. Because there are high rates of incumbent reelection, there are many current Senators whose earlier websites were in the dataset. When Senators were reelected in the period studied (2002/2008 or 2004/2010) the promises they made on women’s and LGBTQ issues often did not change from one election to the next. However, a lot has changed in these issue areas from the end of the period until now. Language on these topics evolves and there are new issues that emerge over time. A few examples will help illustrate the range of possibilities in current
candidate websites.

On one end of the spectrum, there are certainly still candidates who do not address women’s and/or LGBTQ issues on their websites. Overall, it appears that candidates may be saying less on their websites, even though new technology allows for better formatting and advanced features that could really optimize longer text. For some candidates, discussion of any issues is limited. One example is Dick Durbin’s 2020 campaign website which offers only “home”, “about”, “shop”, and “donate” tabs and the “about” tab addressed only 5 topics and did so with just 482 words. For others, they may discuss some issues, but not women’s and LGBTQ issues.

One example of a candidate mentioning women’s and LGBTQ issues briefly is Senator Mike Rounds (2020). Senator Rounds included, “Family Values: Mike supports the South Dakota Constitution and the traditional definition of marriage. Pro-Life: Mike is pro-life.” Senator Rounds did not share much about his positions, but he did make them clear.

Senator Sherrod Brown’s current (2018, accessed in 2020) campaign website includes,

_We have made great strides toward a more level playing field for Ohio women. I am proud to have helped pass the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and been an original cosponsor of the Paycheck Fairness Act. But we still have work to do._

This statement appears on a tab called “Women’s Rights” but his 2012 website had no mention of women’s issues, even on other tabs. This addition is interesting because Senator Brown (co)sponsored four bills on women’s work issues in the 112th Congress, just prior to his 2012 election and a total of 12 women’s work bills across the entire previous term. After his 2012 reelection, in the 113th Congress, Senator Brown (co)sponsored five bills on women’s work issues. Though he was active on this issue prior to his 2012 campaign, he opted not to highlight his work or position on the topic. It could be that he wanted to speak in terms of passed
legislation rather than just efforts but his effort and attention to the issue was certainly consistent at least one term prior to when he featured the issue on his campaign website.

A 2020 challenger, Amy McGrath, mentioned three women’s issues, but did so in a way that was a bit different from standard practice in the previous campaigns studied. She included a story of advocating for women in the military as a child eager to enlist. She then mentioned women’s rights as something we must protect on a “foreign policy and national security” page. The final mention was of immigrants’ rights, the “domestic abuse” a particular asylum seeker was trying to escape and the need for a “humane way” that does not separate mothers from their children. It is apparent that some issues remain relevant—women in the military and women’s rights broadly—but women’s rights within immigration is a newer concern. McGrath’s website also contains more statements about her opponent, Senator Mitch McConnell, than was standard in the period studied. This is likely a result of Senator McConnell’s status as Senate Majority Leader and his reputation within the Senate. However, it is notable that none of McGrath’s statements about women’s rights reference her male opponent, especially given that he has been somewhat active on women’s issues.

Without doing a complete survey of the more recent websites, it is difficult to draw many conclusions about how current websites might compare to those included in this study. Nonetheless, it is clear that women’s and LGBTQ issues have a lasting presence in Senate campaigns to this day and these topics have continued relevance in Senate legislative efforts and, more importantly, in the lives of many Americans.

Summary

Women and LGBTQ Americans have not always had a great deal of descriptive representation, but they do have some unique needs that their elected officials should keep in mind. Women make up approximately 50 percent of the population and the LGBTQ population is growing in number and visibility, so ensuring that these constituencies’ needs are addressed is
not only good for democracy, but also good political strategy. By surveying the websites of U.S. Senate candidates from the 109th-113th Congresses who went on to win their elections, it became clear that many Senators of all gender identities and sexualities are addressing women’s and LGBTQ issues, at least in some way. Perhaps more importantly, when they address these issues in votes or introductions, the vast majority of their actions are consistent with the commitments they made during their campaigns. There are, certainly, instances in which candidates did not follow through on campaign promises, but seeing that most do is a positive finding for our representative democracy. More research is needed to determine whether the women’s and LGBTQ issues that non-women, non-LGBTQ Senators are addressing are the issues that are of greatest concern to these populations, but this first step of seeing whether and how women’s and LGBTQ issues were being discussed and acted upon is a good start.
References


Journal of Communication, 67(1), 97-112. [Link]


Appendix

Sample Promises as Found on Websites

On The Issues

Choice

I believe that abortion before viability is a very personal decision that should be made by a woman in consultation with her family, her doctor, and her Creator, not by the government or politicians. In 2003, I voted once again to reaffirm the Supreme Court ruling in Roe v. Wade which protects a woman’s right to choose abortion before viability. However, I have consistently voted to ban certain late-term abortions because I believe we should ban all forms of abortion after viability except in cases where a late term abortion is medically necessary to protect the life or the serious physical health of the mother.

< Return to On The Issues

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Montana’s Senator Max Baucus

A proven record on the issues that matter to women and families.

Throughout his tenure in the Senate, Max Baucus has consistently fought for issues that are important to women: the right to choose, access to quality health care and protection against both physical harm and discrimination. His leadership and support in these areas have improved the quality of life for American women and helped grant them the equality they deserve.

Protecting Women’s Rights to Choose

- Max has a lifetime 100 percent approval rating from the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL).

- Since 1995, on the votes that Planned Parenthood considered most important, Max voted their preferred position 100 percent of the time.


- Max worked to secure more than $1 million to fund family planning clinics around Montana. The clinics offer family planning services on all medically approved methods of contraception, as well as counseling services, physical examinations, information on fertility and services to adolescents.

Working to Protect Women from Violence

- In 1999, Max cosponsored the Violence Against Women Act II, which strengthened law enforcement to reduce violence against women. Specifically, money designated through this act was used to train police officers, prosecutors and judges on the unique aspects of cases involving violence against women.

- Max’s Violence Against Women Act II also improved services to the victims of domestic violence, giving female victims money for counseling and legal assistance.

- Through the 1999 act, Max expanded the original Violence Against Women Act to include additional protection to elderly women.

- Max helped secure STOP (Services Training Officers Prosecutors) Violence Against Indian Women grants for the Salish and Kootenai tribes. The funding was used to provide legal advocacy, support groups and referral to area service providers to the women of the Flathead Reservation.
Equality for all Oregonians

Jeff Merkley has publicly stood tall above the crowd, not just when election time rolls around, advocating for the fair and equal treatment of all Americans. He will do the same in the U.S. Senate.

Merkley strongly supports marriage equality and will lead the way for equal rights in the U.S. Senate. His efforts in Oregon to legalize civil unions were so fierce that the Republican Speaker Karen Minnis threatened to have state police remove him from the Oregon House chamber in 2005.

In 2007 Merkley brought lawmakers together to legalize domestic partnerships for the first time in state history.

In the U.S. Senate, Merkley will oppose a constitutional ban on marriage equality, just like he actively campaigned against Ballot Measure 36. Merkley will also champion reforms like the landmark bill that banned discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Merkley will continue the fight to end unfair and unjust discrimination in America. Jeff Merkley’s actions and beliefs consistently support his strong public record against denying any person a job, housing, healthcare, education or a seat in a public restaurant solely based upon their sexual orientation or gender identity of any person.

Merkley also fully supports a comprehensive Federal Hate Crimes bill which would increase the criminal penalties for violent assaults against a person based upon their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Republican Gordon Smith twice voted for Constitutional amendments to ban marriage equality. In election years, to drum up right-wing support for their candidates, Republicans brought Constitutional amendments to ban marriage equality to the Senate. Each time, Gordon Smith voted with the likes of Rick Santorum, Trent Lott and Bill Frist. Twice Smith voted with Republicans to strip the states of their rights to make this decision for themselves. Twice Smith voted against equality for all Americans. [Senate vote #155, 7/14/04; Senate vote #163, 4/7/06]

Posted January 6, 2008

Issues
ON THE ISSUES

Supporting Women

As a husband, father of a daughter, and longtime supporter of women’s rights, the issues that impact women have always been extremely important to me. Whether it is women’s health, equality in the workplace, or protecting a woman’s right to choose, as a U.S. Senator, I will be a fierce advocate for women.

Supporting Choice and Reproductive Rights.

I will fight to protect a woman’s right to choose and ensure that abortion remains safe, legal and rare. My understanding of the importance of this right was reinforced by my experience as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun. As Connecticut’s Attorney General, I have strongly and consistently opposed measures infringing upon women’s reproductive rights.

- Preventing Violence Outside Reproductive Health Facilities. I brought the first lawsuit to enforce the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which makes it a crime for demonstrators to use force or block access to reproductive health facilities. I obtained a permanent injunction against protestors who refused to comply with a court order to keep away from clinic entrances in Connecticut.

- Ensuring that All Legal Forms of Contraception Remain Available. I filed suit to halt enforcement of the so-called Provider Conscience Rule, which would have allowed any health service worker or organization to refuse to provide services it opposed. When Walmart announced that it would ban Plan B emergency contraceptives in its stores, I worked to ensure that no Connecticut retailer could refuse to stock emergency contraception.

Improving Women’s Health Care.

I believe that public officials can help advance women’s health care and ensure that the particular medical issues that affect women receive the attention they require. I called on the Connecticut General Assembly to enact legislation prohibiting insurance companies from charging women more for health insurance based on their gender, and I proudly support the provision of the health reform legislation that declares this practice to be illegal. I support increasing funding to research the cancers that affect women and efforts to increase research and awareness of women’s heart health.

Ensuring Equality in the Workplace.

Although the treatment of women in the workplace has improved significantly, I believe there are still far too many cases of discrimination, sexual harassment, and pay inequality. In Connecticut, women earn only 76 cents on average for every dollar earned by a man. I supported the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which improved the ability of victims of pay discrimination to challenge that discrimination in court. As a U.S. Senator, I will work to permanently close the wage gap, expand career opportunities for women, and prevent sexual harassment.

Standing Up Against Domestic Violence.

Domestic violence threatens families and children alike. It can never be tolerated. Strong support networks are needed to prevent it. Toward that end, I’ve served as the chair of the “Men Make a Difference” campaign and “Men Against Domestic Violence” for Interval House, a nonprofit organization and shelter in Hartford providing support for women and children who are victims of such violence.

In the Senate, I will be a tireless advocate for expanding and fully funding The Violence Against Women Act to ensure that law enforcement has the tools it needs to keep families safe. The Violence Against Women Act (VAVA) will be re-authorized next year. It is a landmark statute aimed at combating domestic violence, as well as sexual assault and stalking. It provides billions to support investigations and prosecutions of vicious acts, as well as additional protections and remedies for assaulted women.