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## Are parties true to their word? Platform politics in the 1996 election

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**ARE PARTIES TRUE TO THEIR WORD?  
PLATFORM POLITICS IN THE 1996 ELECTION**

**A Thesis  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Designation  
University Honors**

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University of Northern Iowa  
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**This Study By:** Catherine Louise Olexa

**Entitled: “Are Parties True to Their Word? Platform Politics in the 1996 Election”**

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12/21/04

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**Jessica Moon, ~~Director~~ Director,  
University Honors Program**

## **Are Parties True to Their Word? Platform Politics in the 1996 Election**

There is a certain cynicism that prevails in our American culture when it comes to politics. Many people view politicians in a negative light, believing that a politician will say whatever voters want to hear while he or she is on the campaign trail, but that those promises are not made good upon after the election. It is for this reason that I chose to write on this issue of political promises. Despite the common attitude of skepticism, the question must be posed: Do parties and politicians keep their promises? There is no easy way to answer this question, because the nature of political science, and the behavior of government institutions can be difficult to interpret. One person may understand an action to have kept a promise, while another may say that the action did not go nearly far enough to solve the problem at hand. The most effective method of researching this topic is to examine the pledges made by each party in their party platform, and to compare those pledges with the actual legislative results that the parties were able to achieve in the following years. This writing will attempt to answer this question by examining the fulfillment of platform pledges in the 1996 general election, and will provide some evidence that parties do indeed still keep, or at least attempt to keep their promises.

In researching this issue, one must have a measure by which to judge the parties' record. Every four years, the national Republican and Democratic parties put together a platform that tells of all the positions, goals and other-party criticism that the candidates of each party will uphold as representing their views. The delegates of the party ratify these platforms during the national convention, which is also when the presidential nominee of the party is formally presented to the public. In the party

platform are pledges for future action that the members of the party seek to accomplish. These are the statements that will be used to judge the actions of the party, and will determine whether or not they keep their word. There is some previous research done on this topic that provides some historical background about party pledges and fulfillment.

### **Established Literature**

The most well respected research on this topic of party platforms was published by Gerald Pomper in 1980. In this second edition of his book, *Elections in America*, Pomper addresses this question of the loyalty of a party to its platform. His hypothesis was that party platforms are indeed fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> Through the use of quantitative methods, Pomper was able to come to some general conclusions about how well the promises made in party platforms are kept.

In his study of platforms, Pomper analyzed both Republican and Democratic platforms from the period 1944-1976.<sup>2</sup> The method he used in determining the fulfillment of the platforms was content analysis. Content analysis was described by Robert North as “a term used to describe a variety of research techniques, all of which are used for systematically collecting, analyzing, and making inferences from messages.”<sup>3</sup> Gerald Pomper and his assistants used this method of research to place the different pledges from the platforms into categories. The unit of analysis employed by Pomper was a single statement, whether it be a few words or more than a sentence.<sup>4</sup> His three categories for these statements were as follows: 1) rhetoric and fact, 2) evaluation of the parties’ records and past performance, and 3) future policy pledges.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Pomper, *Elections in America* (New York: Longman Inc., 1980), 158.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>3</sup> Robert C. North et al., *Content Analysis* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Pomper, *Elections in America*, 133.

Study of the fulfillment of pledges can only be accomplished through the study of future policy pledges, which Pomper addresses in the eighth chapter of his book. A future policy pledge is a promise of some type of future action. According to Pomper, most voters do not read the entire platform.<sup>5</sup> However, the stances of each party are usually communicated to the voters through individual candidates and mass media outlets, such as newspapers and television. The voters then use this information to decide which party to is aligned more closely to their views, and widely base their vote on party identification.

There are clear statements in a platform that state the party's intentions for action in the future, as well as its stance on important issues. In his book, Pomper divides this category of future policies into six smaller categories according to specificity of the content. They include: 1) rhetorical pledges, 2) general pledges, 3) pledges of continuity, 4) expression of goals and concerns, 5) pledges of action, and 6) detailed pledges.<sup>6</sup> The pledges were also divided into nine policy areas, which are as follows: foreign policy, defense, economic policy, labor, agriculture, resources, social welfare, government, and civil rights and ethnic policy.<sup>7</sup>

In his method, Pomper used statements in the third through sixth categories. These were found to be about one third of all of the platform statements. After the pledges were divided into these categories, Pomper then sought to match the pledge with the legislative action that was taken in the next four years by either Congress or the executive branch. His main resource in this research was the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, the document published annually by the federal government, which describes

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 135.

all of the legislative action that took place in a given year. Defining fulfillment is rather subjective, because of the nature of the legislative system. The government is built on a system of compromise. In order for a bill to be passed, it must be agreed upon by the executive, and two houses of Congress. To reach that point, there must be concessions made on both sides, and neither one is likely to achieve everything that they originally hoped for. In fulfilling platform pledges, the fulfilling legislation is likely to look somewhat different from the original promise. What Pomper tried to do in deciding fulfillment was to make sure that the “spirit of the pledge” was fulfilled.<sup>8</sup>

After examination of the *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*, the pledges fell into six different levels of fulfillment. If a pledge was fulfilled in all of the aspects that it promised, it was considered to have “full action.” If the action taken on the pledge was by the President, such as court appointments and executive orders, it was considered an “executive action.” A pledge was considered to be “similar action” by Pomper if part, but not the entire pledge was fulfilled, or if there was an accomplishment that was comparable to the action promised. Pomper also considered situations in which there was “negative fulfillment” on pledges that promised one thing, but the opposite action was taken. If the legislature attempted to fulfill a platform pledge, but it was voted down on the floor of the House or Senate, or vetoed by the President, it was considered to be “defeated.” Lastly, if there was no chamber floor vote on legislation, or the pledge was entirely ignored, it was considered to have “no floor action.”<sup>9</sup> This category includes committee actions. Even though legislation is introduced into a congressional committee,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 160.

if it is not sent to the floor for debate or a vote, then there is not enough significant action in Pomper's view to be included in the "failed" category.

When the data was analyzed, Pomper was able to draw some valuable conclusions. He found that indeed parties do keep their promises. In the first two decades of his research, three-fourths of the total pledges were kept with either full or similar action. In the final decade of his research, the parties kept two-thirds of their promises. He also pointed out the unexpectedly high success rate of the party out of power. Even without the control of the executive office, the party out of power was able to attain over half of its pledges. When one considers the bipartisan pledges, the rate of success skyrockets, and with the backing of both parties, these pledges almost guarantee fulfillment.<sup>10</sup>

These conclusions led Gerald Pomper to make the inference that platforms do influence policy. The parties themselves ratify platforms, and there is a concerted effort put forth by the politicians to keep the promises made in them. One important thing to note is that the party who controls the White House has much more power to keep promises because of the role of the President in signing legislation. This is especially important when considering contentious issues. If we were to base the answer to our original question (Do parties enact their platforms?) with Pomper's research, the obvious answer is yes, to a large extent, they do. However, I believe that there is need for continued research in this area because of how the political atmosphere has changed in the decades that have elapsed since Pomper's research for *Elections in America*.

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald Pomper, *Elections in America* (New York: Longman Inc., 1980), 161.



## Reasons for Update

Since the time of Pomper's research, there has been a change in the political climate. Now, the government is in an era of divided government, and there is also much more polarization in Congress. Now, much more than before, it is likely that one party will control the Congress, or at least one chamber, and another will control the Presidency. An article by Charles Cameron concludes that political parties are more ideologically polarized than they have ever been.<sup>11</sup> He used a system of nominate scores based on roll call voting in the Congress to determine the polarity. He found that since 1980, the average ideological distance between the parties was twice that of previous years. Cameron also found that a contributing factor to this polarization was the phenomenon of divided government. In the chart (figure 1) below, he shows that the likelihood of there being a divided party government has also increased greatly in this time period.

Figure 1: The Probability of Divided Government Timeline

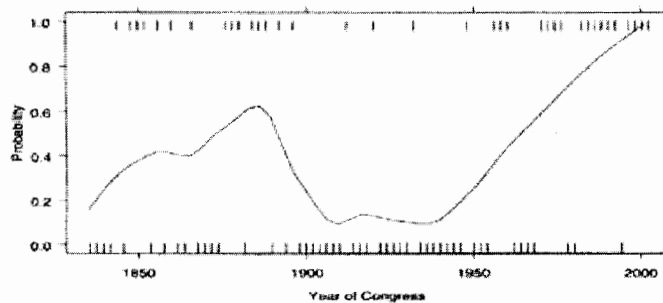


FIGURE 2. The Incidence and Probability of Divided Party Government, 1835-2002.

Source: Cameron, "Studying the Polarized Presidency", *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 2002

According to Sarah Binder in her book *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock*, divided government does not necessarily have much of an effect on the quantity of legislation passed. However, she said that divided government seriously

<sup>11</sup> Charles M. Cameron, "Studying the Polarized Presidency", *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, December 2002, 647.

handicaps the ability of the legislature to address serious public problems.<sup>12</sup> Split party control increases the chance that issues on the congressional agenda will end in gridlock. In the same vein, polarization in any two-party legislative body is likely to result in a lack of policy change or slow passage of legislation. According to Binder, the polarization increased steadily over the 1980's and 1990's.<sup>13</sup> The result of this increase was less cooperation, and less legislation passed.

Because of these changes in the division of power in Congress and the presidency, and the ideological polarization of parties, this study of party platforms warrants an update. One can draw the conclusion that in recent decades, there have been many more obstacles to cooperation in Congress. There is a great possibility that in a study of the 1990's, the record of fulfillment would be noticeably different from what Pomper discovered about platforms in previous decades.

### **Why the 1996-2000 Period?**

In her book, Sarah Binder analyzed the 89<sup>th</sup> through the 107<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congresses. The 105<sup>th</sup> (1997-1998) and 106<sup>th</sup> (1999-2000) Congresses had the lowest scores in regard to party moderation.<sup>14</sup> These scores show that the parties in 1996-2000 were more polarized than they ever were before. This fact alone makes this time period a fine candidate for evaluation of party platforms. However, there are other reasons why I chose to focus on these years in my research. Divided government prevailed throughout the Clinton administration's second term, and while the Democrats controlled the presidency, the Republicans led the Congress. Also, an interesting unplanned incidence

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah Binder, *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2003), 67.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>14</sup> Binder, *Stalemate*, 158.

in this time period is the attempted impeachment of President Clinton in 1998 and 1999. I believe that this event shows an interesting side effect of partisan polarization mixed with divided government: the increased likelihood of political scandal.

### **Methodology Used for Updated Research**

This project will use the Republican and Democratic platforms from the 1996 general election to determine if the conclusion that parties in fact *do* enact their platforms held true in a much different political atmosphere than the one under which this conclusion was drawn. Although I hope to supplement the findings of Gerald Pomper in *Elections in America*, the methodology used for my research differs somewhat from his. In order to reduce the amount of subjectivity on my part as a researcher, and for purposes of completing the undertaking as expeditiously as possible, the field of future action pledges was narrowed. For this endeavor, only specific pledges were included. If compared to Pomper's method, these pledges would mostly be comprised of "pledges of action," and "detailed pledges of action."

For example, an included pledge would be a statement such as, "We call for a Charity Tax Credit... to insure the religiously affiliated institutions can fulfill their helping missions."<sup>15</sup> The scope of this pledge, taken from the Republican platform, shows specificity and allows for a definitive conclusion in regard to fulfillment. In the categories of "goals and concerns" and "continuity," the scope of the pledge was usually extremely broad, and would require much interpretation on my part as to whether or not the pledge was fulfilled. An example of an excluded pledge is, "We will establish 'no frills' prisons where prisoners are required to work productively and make the threat of

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<sup>15</sup> Prentice Hall Document Library, "1996 Republican Platform"; available online from [cwx.prenhall.com/bookbind/pubbooks/berman4/medialib/Election/rplat96.htm](http://cwx.prenhall.com/bookbind/pubbooks/berman4/medialib/Election/rplat96.htm); Internet; accessed 13 September, 2004.

jail a real deterrent to crime.”<sup>16</sup> Also taken from the Republican platform, this pledge could be interpreted many different ways. How does one define a “no frills prison?” Pledges like these are too subjective in nature and were omitted from this study because the specific policy prescription is difficult to discern. For this project, I identified and examined fifty-two democratic pledges, and ninety republican pledges. Though this research is certainly not as complete as the information covered in *Elections in America*, I believe that the data I worked with can still be useful in drawing conclusions about platform fulfillment.

Another modification made to Pomper’s method is that I only examined Congressional action, and did not address executive action except for the presidential veto, which is the president’s legislative tool. In so doing, I utilized the same primary resource as Pomper, the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*.<sup>17</sup> The four volumes I used were for the years 1997-2000, because the Congress elected in 1996 did not come into session until 1997. However, unlike Pomper in 1980, I was able to utilize other helpful resources through the Internet, especially the Library of Congress. If I was unable to locate legislation in the *Congressional Quarterly*, I utilized Internet sources for additional clues about the status of the bill in question. One of the most valuable secondary resources that I utilized on the Internet was “THOMAS,” the Library of Congress website.<sup>18</sup> This source makes legislation available with the use of keyword searches and access to the text of individual bills, and was unavailable to Pomper when he conducted his research in 1980.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> The appropriate volumes of the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* included vol. 53, 1997, vol. 54, 1998, vol. 55, 1999, and vol. 56, 2000 (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features).

<sup>18</sup> Library of Congress, “THOMAS, Legislative Information on the Internet”; available from <http://thomas.loc.gov>; Internet; accessed 2004.

In determining fulfillment of pledges, I grouped the results into four categories. If a pledge promise was kept in its entirety, it was considered to have “full action.” If there was similar action or the party did not achieve the pledge in all of its aspects, it had “partial action.” Pledges that were voted down on the chamber floor of either the House or the Senate, or vetoed by the President were considered to have “failed.” Lastly, a pledge had “no floor action” if it was ignored by the party or failed to come to the floor for a vote. This includes bills that were only introduced in committee.<sup>19</sup>

The last modification I made to Pomper’s method was a change in the policy areas that the pledges were grouped under. Instead of using his method, I found it better in this case to use policy areas specified by the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. These areas are as follows: 1) defense and foreign policy, 2) economics and finance, 3) labor and employment, 4) agriculture, 5) environment and energy, 6) law and judiciary, 7) health and human services, 8) government and commerce. These categories better fit the data set that I worked with.<sup>20</sup>

### **Hypothesis**

Before the research for this project was completed, I formed some hypotheses based on writings about party polarization, divided government, and their effect on the policy process. I assumed that there would be some gridlock in Congress, especially on issues of public importance like health care, education, and crime. This gridlock would most likely result from the drastically different views on the issues presented in the two platforms. Since the party in control of the presidency was the Democrats, I assumed that

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<sup>19</sup> Note: There is a large qualitative difference between legislation that is absolutely ignored by the party, and legislation that is considered in committee or bill mark up. Since this difference is not addressed by Pomper, I do not address it here.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A, where policy areas and content analysis is addressed more thoroughly.

they would have a higher success rate than the Republicans based on Pomper's findings. He found that the party in control of the executive branch tended to have a higher success rate than the party "out of power." However, it is important to note that in this time period, the Republicans did have a substantial amount of power since they held a majority in both houses of Congress.

Also, I thought success would be more likely for the Democrats based on the nature of the platform. The Democratic platform was shorter, having thirty-six pages, than the lengthy Republican platform of sixty-five pages. It also seemed to be more pragmatic in the scope of its promises. For example, the Democrats promised to work for tax credits for college. The Republicans promised not only to reform education spending, but also to eliminate the Department of Education. A pledge like this really had no chance of being fulfilled, regardless of who controlled Congress. The nature of the government is such that once a cabinet-level department is established; it is quite difficult to remove it. It seemed that the republicans pledged quite a few things that seemed overreaching. They sought to eliminate federal agencies like the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Energy and the Department of Commerce. Their reasoning for doing this was to give these powers back to the states, and to have a smaller federal government. Also, they pledged to overhaul the tax code so that a citizen could calculate their taxes on the back of a postcard. On top of these pledges, they proposed a few amendments to the Constitution; such as a "human life amendment," an amendment to prohibit "flag burning or desecration", a "victim's rights" amendment and a "balanced budget amendment." Many pledges such as these are not really meant to be

kept, but are symbolic in nature, meant to appeal to the Republican constituency, and to fire up the voters.

Pledges that were made by both parties are considered to be “bipartisan” in nature. However, sometimes even pledges that look the same on the surface had much different implications in terms of legislation. For example, both parties had the goal to balance the federal budget. However, the Republicans wanted to pass a constitutional amendment that would require the budget to be balanced, but the Democrats were more relaxed in regard to this, and were still advocating greater funding for many government programs. Another example of this type of pledge addressed campaign finance reform. Both parties advocated for reform in this area, however the Republicans were much more willing to vote for legislation that would place strict regulations on campaigns. Democrats used the power they had in the Senate to stop the McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Reform Bill, the major campaign finance legislation considered in this period. As a result of this difference of opinion regarding the extent of the regulation imposed by legislation, only a small aspect of this legislation was passed.

In regard to these bipartisan pledges, I hypothesized that they were fulfilled, or partially fulfilled because they had the backing of both parties of Congress. The Republican Party was out of power by Pomper’s definition, but held control of both houses of Congress. This is significant because Democrats were left with few ways to bring their legislation to the Congress floor. In this situation, I would hypothesize that the Republicans would bring as much of their legislation to the floor as possible, but would battle with a President who was willing to veto almost anything with which he disagreed.

## Results

### *Democratic Pledge Fulfillment 1997-2000*

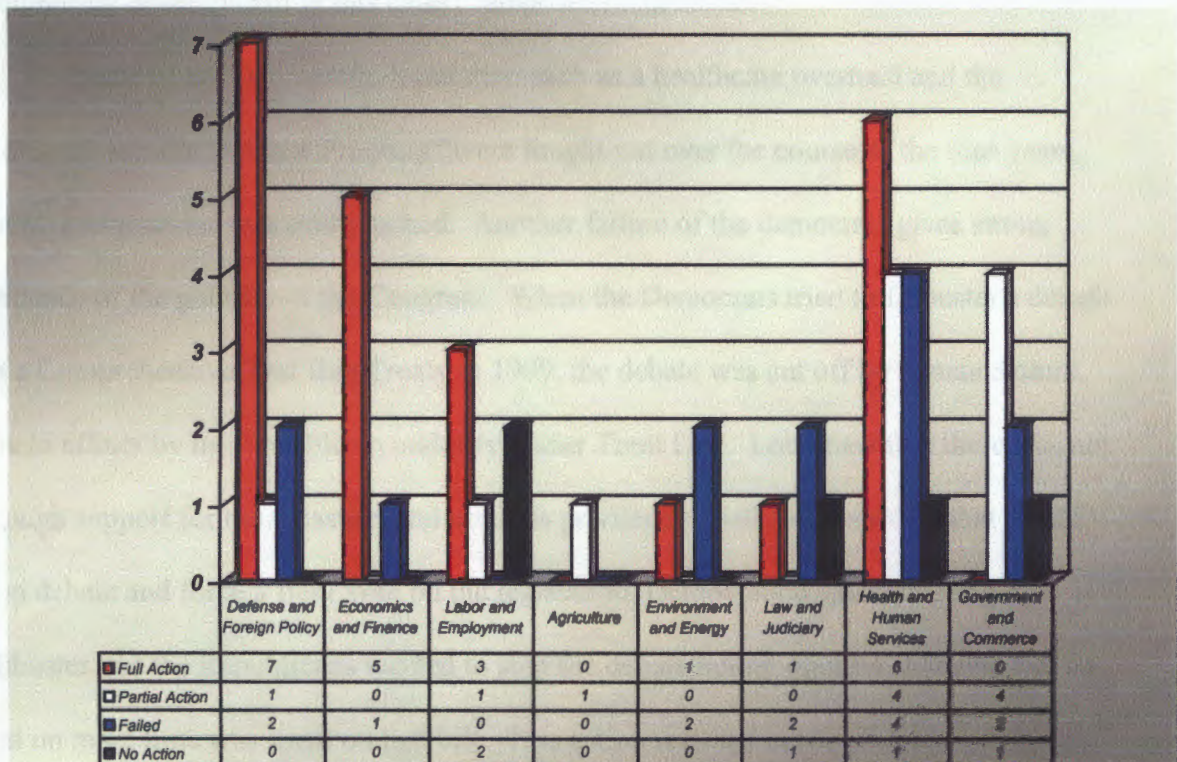


Figure 2

While I expected the Democrats to do fairly well in passing their platform, I assumed that they would have some difficulties given the Republican control in Congress. Pomper projected that the party in power would achieve between two-thirds and three-fourths of their platform. Between 1997 and 2000, the Democrats, who were technically “in power” by Pomper’s definition, fulfilled sixty-five percent of their specific pledges. This number fits with Pomper’s data, but is higher than I expected given the polarity of the parties, and it was somewhat surprising to see them achieve this level of success. Some of the major pledges that they succeeded on include increased



funding for local police departments (with Clinton's "Cops on the Beat" initiative to hire 100,000 new police officers), permanent normal trading status with China, and community development grants called "empowerment zones."<sup>21</sup>

Some of the Democratic legislation such as a healthcare overhaul and the "National Missile Defense Program" were fought out over the course of the four years, but no compromise was ever reached. Another failure of the democrats gives strong evidence of the polarity of the Congress. When the Democrats tried to filibuster a debate on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1999, the debate was cut off by Senate cloture, due to efforts by the Republican majority leader Trent Lott. Lott knew that there was not enough support for the measure, and used his privilege to call a cloture vote that would stop debate and force a floor vote on the legislation. Democrats were attempting a filibuster and the Republicans wanted to stop the debate before opinion changed, and so that no more time was spent on that bill. This action resulted in sound defeat of the legislation, and an embarrassment for the Clinton administration.<sup>22</sup> Situations like this, and inter-party disagreements happened quite often, but the Republicans were often not as effective in blocking Democratic initiatives as one would think they should have been. They decided what was put on the floor for debate, but they knew that President Clinton would be willing to veto bills that did not meet his standards. Between 1997 and 2000, Clinton vetoed twenty bills that came across his desk.<sup>23</sup> For a period of eighteen months, he even had the power of the "line-item" veto, and took a few opportunities to strike individual appropriations measures from bills. Because of this relationship, which was

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix B for other samples of successes and failures for each party.

<sup>22</sup> David Rapp, ed. "Inside Congress," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington D.C.: 1999), vol.55, 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> David Rapp, ed. "Second Session by the Numbers," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington D.C.: 2000), vol. 56, 1-6.

defined by friction and partisanship between the legislative and the executive branches, there were many omnibus bills, and seemingly all-encompassing legislation, which attempted to make both parties happy. The Democrats had a record (sixty-five percent fulfillment), which seems to be consistent with Pomper's findings for a party in power and divided government (sixty percent). The Republicans, on the other hand, have quite a different story.

### *Republican Pledge Fulfillment 1997-2000*

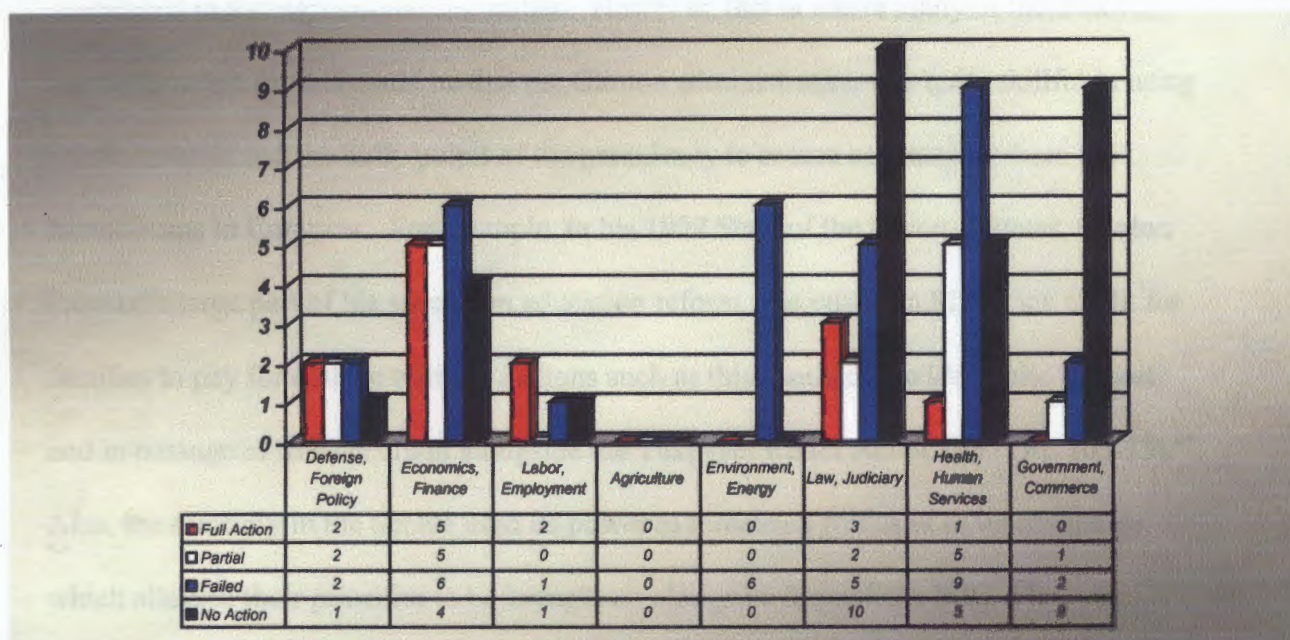


Figure 3

According to Pomper, the party out of power should still have around fifty percent of their pledges fulfilled or at least partially fulfilled. In these congressional sessions, Republicans only succeeded on about thirty percent of their specific pledges. Since they had control in the Congress, this would seem almost counter-intuitive. However, the long and drawn out impeachment trial of the president was a major intervening factor that was not planned on when the platform was written. This investigation lasted for most of the 1998 and 1999 congressional sessions. I believe that one reason for low fulfillment on

the part of the Republicans was because they led impeachment effort, which took much of their time and attention away from their own legislation. The time they lost during this time could have been used to debate their bills on the House and Senate floors, instead of for the effort to impeach the president. Still, one may think, they had two full sessions that this did not effect.

The high percentage of Republican bills that fall under the “no action” category may be a bit deceiving. Almost all of their pledges were turned into legislation and considered in a congressional committee. However, that is where many of them stayed. An explanation for this could be that the Clinton administration was quite skillful in using public opinion and the bully pulpit of the presidency to secure concessions from the Republicans in Congress. For example, in his 1997 State of the Union Address, Clinton focused a large part of his speech on education reform. He pushed a \$1500 tax credit for families to pay for college tuition. Actions such as this resulted in wide public support, and in passage of this tax credit alongside the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 (PL 105-33).<sup>24</sup> Also, the minority in the Senate used its power to threaten a filibuster to its advantage, which allowed their priorities to be brought up alongside Republican bills. However, another explanation may be that most of the congressional sessions were spent debating large bills, and passage of legislation was even slower than the normal pace for Congress.

Perhaps the Republicans also were treading carefully after their setbacks in the previous 104<sup>th</sup> Congress. When they gained the majority in Congress in 1994, the Republican Party forced their agenda through Congress, only to be met with vetoes from the president, and government shutdown in 1995 over appropriations bills. The party was

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<sup>24</sup> David Rapp, ed. “Inside Congress,” *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, (Washington D.C.: 1997) vol. 53, 1-8.

blamed for that shutdown and suffered a loss of public credibility. In the following years of 1997 and the beginning of 1998, it seemed that they were a bit more cautious and were willing to work with Democrats somewhat. They did not necessarily bring Democratic legislation to the floor, but allowed them to add rider bills and amendments to Republican legislation in order to convince President Clinton to sign them.

These efforts toward cooperation seem to have been derailed by the impeachment trial. That event stopped both parties from accomplishing a great deal in the latter part of 1998, and in 1999. Due to lack of congressional action, and the length of the impeachment proceedings, Republicans lost five of their seats in the House and did not gain any in the Senate after the 1998 midterm election.<sup>25</sup> These events lend credibility to the idea that when a government is divided and polarized, a political scandal will gain much more focus than it otherwise would have. In the case of the Republicans of the 105<sup>th</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> Congresses, they had every intention of passing their platform, but were confronted with difficult vetoes, and sidetracked by scandal.

### *Bipartisan Pledges*

As suspected, Congress enacted most of the bipartisan pledges. These pledges were promised by both parties in their platforms, even though they often had different implications in regard to the reach of the desired legislation. One of the most important bipartisan pledges was to balance the federal budget. In 1997, Congress passed a budget resolution that required the federal budget to be balanced by the year 2002. In 1997, they amazingly balanced the budget for fiscal year 1998, and even achieved an unexpected surplus, by setting spending caps and cutting funding on programs like Medicare.

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Lacayo, "Now hear this: the GOP thought it was the year," *Time*, 9 November 1998; available from <http://www.CNN.com/ALLPOLITICS/time/1998/11/09/election.html>; Internet; accessed 10 October 2004.

However, in the following three Congresses, they broke the spending caps and were forced to pass spending bills in omnibus legislation, and often with many continuing resolutions. Another pledge that both parties agreed upon was to revamp campaign finance laws. The McCain-Feingold legislation died in 1999 after struggling through three sessions with no action. However, in 2000, members were able to agree on some aspects of reform, and passed legislation to force the disclosure of funds from “527” political groups. Bipartisan pledges were fulfilled in some form, though not always easily. Even though the pledges had the backing of both parties, there were still areas of contention within the legislation that led to slow passage.

### **Conclusions**

After examination of each party’s record in Congress between 1997 and 2000, one can plainly see that the platforms of the parties were important in the way which parties approach governance. While there were some intervening factors that kept the Republicans from attaining the expected level of fulfillment, the bulk of the pledges they made in their 1996 platform were turned into legislation, even if they were stalled in committee. If we return to our original question about whether or not parties enact their platforms, a generalization from this study would lead us to believe that yes, they still do. In Pomper’s previous study of party platforms, he concluded that the party controlling the presidency would attain between sixty and seventy-five percent fulfillment. In this updated study of the period between 1997 and 2000, the Democrats fulfilled sixty-five percent of their specific platform pledges, and Republicans achieved thirty percent. The Republicans did not fulfill the expected amount of pledges, which according to Gerald Pomper would have been fifty percent. There was a presidential impeachment trial, and

other legislative difficulties facing the Republicans in this period, which may have hindered their effectiveness. It appears that in times of divided government and polarization it is more difficult to get pledges fulfilled, especially if they are controversial or overreaching. Based on the findings of Sarah Binder about stalemate and gridlock, the actions of the 105<sup>th</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> Congresses seem to fit in perfectly. The legislation was slow to be passed, and neither party was able to achieve certain staples of their platforms. For example, the original campaign finance reform bill, a Republican initiative, struggled through three sessions before it was killed in 1999, and legislation to reform the tax code (Republican) and the overhaul of the health care system (Democratic) were not accomplished by either party.

As I had originally hypothesized, things have changed since Gerald Pomper conducted his research. Platforms are still important, however there is a higher likelihood of gridlock in areas of major policy change, such as health care reform and overhaul of the Superfund program that funds the cleanup of brownfields. The Democrats did surprisingly well under the circumstances, however this was again due to the pragmatic nature of their platform and the ability of President Clinton to push his agenda through vetoes, and the pressure of public support.

Political platforms are still a good guide of a party's future action. They guide the politicians and make their views easily accessible to the public. Even though some promises are not always kept, a voter can still use platforms to determine which party fits their ideological stance. Voters can rest assured that parties will attempt to pass the issues in their platform, and that is the best a citizen can expect when it comes to the complicated maze of the United States government.

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**Appendix A**  
**Content Analysis Form For Party Platform Pledges**  
(Used for Democrat and Republican Platforms)

**Pledge:**

*Specific pledges found in the 1996 Democratic and Republican Platforms.<sup>26</sup>*

**Fulfillment or Type of Action:**

· ***Full Action**- achieved full scope of pledge*

· ***Partial Action**- similar action to what was pledged, but not complete*

· ***Failed**- legislation was voted down on the House or Senate Floor, or vetoed by the President*

· ***No Floor Action**- legislation did not reach House or Senate Floors for voting, but may have been active in a Congressional committee.*

**Date:**

*Year the issue was addressed in the Congress.*

**Bill Number or Action:**

*Specifically what was accomplished by action or not accomplished by inaction or failure.*

**Policy Topic:<sup>27</sup>**

***Defense and Foreign Policy:** defense spending, trade status of other nations, foreign aid, missile defense program, space program, NASA, intelligence, nuclear weapons testing, military research, United Nations issues, terrorism*

***Economics and Finance:** budget and appropriations, taxation and federal fiscal policy, regulation of businesses*

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<sup>26</sup> Changes were made to Pomper's method. He categorized the pledges into six groups, while this research put them into one group, but in large part only addressed what Pomper would have considered to be Pledges of Action or Detailed Pledges of Action.

<sup>27</sup> The policy areas used in this paper were taken directly from the index of the Congressional Quarterly instead of following Pomper's original categories.



**Labor and Employment:** affirmative action, unemployment benefits, trade union relations, minimum wage, job training programs, employment services

**Agriculture:** farm subsidies, production controls, and agricultural research

**Environment and Energy:** regulation of energy industry or Tennessee Valley Authority, environmental policy, toxic waste cleanup and endangered species regulations

**Law and Judiciary:** litigation reform, crime- both juvenile and adult, judicial confirmations, drug policies, police officers, prisons

**Health and Humans Services and Education:** education policy, including school funding, aid for school districts, teacher hiring, loans and grants for college students, policy related to public health, hospitals, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare programs, rent control, social security, veterans benefits

**Government and Commerce:** transportation, commerce regulations, patent regulations, administration, reform of civil service, federal-state relations, governance of the District of Columbia, campaign and election reform

## APPENDIX B

### Sample Fulfilled Pledges

#### 1997:

1. Cleared Legislation to balance Federal Budget by 2002—Bipartisan Pledge
2. Gave Families a 500 dollar per child tax credit--- Bipartisan Pledge
3. Created 20 billion in medical insurance for children of poor families.  
---Democratic
4. Let stand most Favored Nation Status to China--- Democratic

#### 1998:

1. Overhauled Federal public housing policy--- Bipartisan Pledge
2. Increased aid to schools for hiring new teachers (Goals 2000 ---Democratic
3. Block US implementation of Kyoto Treaty--- Republican

#### 1999:

1. Major Education funding under Goals 2000--- Democratic
2. Limit liability for Y2K computer failures--- Republican
3. Call for deployment of national missile-defense system--- Bipartisan Pledge

#### 2000:

1. 7.8 billion to restore Florida's Everglades.---Democratic
2. Permanent normal trade status with China--- Democratic
3. Reauthorize the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, and home heating oil reserve in the Northeast---Republican

### Not Fulfilled

#### 1997:

1. Did not overhaul of Superfund hazardous waste cleanup program---Republican
2. Deregulate the electric power industry. (TVA) ---Republican
3. Override Clinton's veto of Partial Birth Abortion Ban---Republican
4. Approve fast-track negotiating authority to the President for trade agreements.---  
Democratic

**1998:**

1. Did not pass a significant tax cut--- Republican
2. Increase the Minimum Wage--- Democratic
3. Pass a Constitutional Amendment to ban desecration of the American Flag --- Republican

**1999:**

1. Did not enact curbs on gun sales---Bipartisan
2. Revise Campaign Finance Laws---Bipartisan
3. Enact a \$792 billion tax cut.---Republican

**2000:**

1. Did not Expand Educational Savings Accounts--- Republican
2. Stiffen Penalties for juvenile offenders---Republican
3. Repeal the “Estate Tax” or “Marriage Tax.” ---Republican