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My dissertation analyzes the historical development of the United States Congress from 1783-1867 and focuses on the following historical puzzle. In 1860, the country disintegrated into civil war, yet, at precisely that time, the central government completed an expensive and complicated building project, known as the Capitol Extension. The Capitol Extension physically enhanced the central government's size and provided additional stability. With the decision to invest in and complete the Capitol Extension, members institutionalized the central government within the government and architecture of Washington, D.C. The decision further codified actions enhancing the role of the central government in US society that can be traced back to the replacement of the Articles of Confederation with the US Constitution (Article I, section 8, clause 17). That is, at the same time the country was experiencing internal tensions that ultimately led to civil war, the central government was becoming more stable and institutionalized. How is this to be explained? What theoretical explanations emerge and how can these be supported with empirical evidence? These are the sorts of questions my dissertation seeks to answer. The answers to these questions have implications not only for correcting our understanding of historiography, but also for properly theorizing legislatures in newly formed states that are transitioning to democratic governments.

I place the development of a physical working environment for the U.S. Congress within an historical narrative of expanding congressional power during the early 19th century. Within the specialty of congressional history, this expansion is most often tied to the end of the Civil War, the development of national railroads, and an economy increasingly based on industrialization. Without denying the relevancy of these explanations, I enhance them through a focus on physical architecture and a shift in temporal focus. I provide a narrative of experiential learning that situates the seat of government clause within a broader dynamic of social learning influenced by social, economic and political crises.

Whereas the bulk of previous scholarship has focused on Congress as an abstract institution, I emphasize the primacy of the physical nature of Congress as an organizational body. In doing so, my research bridges two sets of scholarly literature that have ignored one another. Architectural historians have chronicled the development of the U.S. Capitol Building but have failed to address the findings of congressional scholarship. Congressional scholars, on the other hand, have ignored the findings of architectural historians and have thus not captured the entire context of the institution. In drawing these two literatures together, my work fills a gap in contemporary scholarship. In brief, I show the ways in which members of Congress sought to overcome the limitations imposed by an inefficient working environment. Building on the theoretical foundations of organizational theory, I detail the expansion of the United States Capitol

Building and the manner in which party leaders, and committee chairmen, sought to enhance their power through architectural enhancements. As these enhancements became institutionalized, and layered on top of one another, the institution became a more effective, capable governing institution. One of the central conclusions of my work, which is quite contrary to the established literature on this period, is that the Congress was an integral engine of national development. Thus, for scholars interested in the study of American political development, my emphasis on the physical attributes of Congress provides insights for expanding our understanding of the substantive increase in federal power at the end of the Civil War.

My future research will continue the historical narrative, taking the development of the congressional physical environment through the dawn of the 21st century. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Congress had begun to construct external office buildings to house and support the membership. By the end of the century, six of these external office buildings had been constructed and, in 1995, Congress entered the 'virtual world' with the introduction of the Thomas web application system. My immediate scholarly goal is two-fold. First, I am interested in narrating the historical processes behind this development, and situating them within a broad theoretical framework. Second, I am interested in developing a comparative framework that will enable me to move beyond the confines of the specific American case and create more generalizable statements about legislatures in other parts of the world.