My Representative: Chris Smith
By Craig Heck

The United States of America was founded on certain ideals and principles, and it was these principles that created the governmental foundation that is still intact today. Breaking free from the tyrannical rule of Great Britain, the founding fathers sought to create a form of government that would represent each state within the United States; since it was the lack of representation in Parliament that led them to secede from Great Britain. Two plans were proposed, the Virginia Plan which would base representation in government on a state’s population, and the New Jersey Plan which based representation at an equal level; meaning, each state would get one representative. A great compromise was reached, and both plans were accepted, the Virginia Plan formed the House of Representatives, and the New Jersey Plan formed the Senate. We still use this form of government to this day, as it has proven to be quite effective in representing all states based on both their population, and also via equal representation. Intrigued by the idea that one single person is representing my entire district in the government, I felt the need to investigate who my representative is, and also, what he is doing to make my life better

Biographical Details

Upon investigating, I discovered that the district representative for Howell is Chris Smith. To try and get a better understand my representative, I felt that I should get to know him better by gathering some biographical information before delving into his political career. Christopher H. Smith is currently 55, male, and is residing in Hamilton, New Jersey with his wife Marie, and his four children: Melissa, Christopher, Michael, and Elyse. He was born on March 3, 1953 in Rahway, New Jersey. He was raised in Iselin, New Jersey for most of his life, and he was an dedicated Boy Scout in his youth, as he was able to attain the highest rank within the scouts – Eagle Scout. After high school, Smith attended Trenton State College, which is now The College of New Jersey. During his time there he also studied abroad for one year, in 1974 attending Worcester College in England. Smith returned to the States and graduated in 1975 with a Bachelor’s in business (“Chris Smith”) (“Christopher Smith”).

Right out of college Smith worked as a manager in his family’s store, but he went on to seek better business ventures and within the same year he had established his own sporting goods wholesale business. Then, in 1976 he acted upon his staunch position against abortion and became the executive director of New Jersey’s Right to Life Committee. The committee’s main focus was to spread pro-life ideas of and to cherish human life, not destroy it. He remained the executive director for Right to Life for two years, until 1978, which is when he first ran for Congress (“Chris Smith”).

Before running for Congress, Smith was a Democrat; but during the mid-to-late 1970’s the Democratic Party supported the landmark decision Roe v. Wade; claiming that it was legal for a woman to get an abortion as long as it was before the fetus had developed past a certain stage. Smith was disgusted by the Democratic support for the decision, so very close to the 1978 Congressional election he changed his political party
from Democrat to Republican. Smith ran for Congress in 1978, but lost. However, he did not let this loss get the best of him. He ran again in 1980 – and came out victorious! He has remained in office for over two decades, starting from his initial induction in 1981, to the current year, 2008. While in office, he has been a member of only three committees, they are the Subcommittee of the Western Hemisphere, the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, and International Relations ("Chris Smith") ("Christopher Smith").

**Congressional District and Constituency**

The role of a representative is just what the word implies; to represent. A representative is supposed to be the voice of the people in the small district for which s/he is responsible. S/he is supposed to attend town and county meetings to see what the interests of his people are, so then s/he can in turn correctly and accurately represent the demographic on Capitol Hill. A representative is supposed to vote and propose bills with the best intentions for the people in his district; s/he is also to bring key problems and issues that are prevalent within his/her district into light at Congress. The district that Chris Smith is responsible for is Congressional District 4 of New Jersey, which is primarily located in central New Jersey. There are only four counties that comprise District 4, they are: Burlington, Mercer, Ocean, and Monmouth. The constituency of these counties is very important, because each county has its own problems based on the people living there – which can vary in race, income, sex, age and even education ("Congressional District 4 Profile") (Congressman Chris Smith).

First, we shall look at the demographic of Burlington County. The residents of Burlington County are primarily white, making up about 76% of Burlington’s total population of 430,454. African-Americans comprise the second largest group 15% of the total population and Latinos make up 5% of the population. The average age of a Burlington resident is around 39 years old, and the population by gender is pretty much split down the middle, with women making up 52% of the population and men 48%. Most of the residents of Burlington, about 34%, only have a high school diploma as their highest form of education. The mean household income for a resident in Burlington is around $76,000 ("Congressional District 4 Profile") (U.S. Census Bureau).

Next we will investigate the county of Mercer. Again, like Burlington, Mercer’s residents are primarily white, making up 62% of Mercer’s total population of 340,889. African-Americans make up 20% of the total population, and Latinos 11%. The average age of someone living in Mercer is 38 years old, and population by gender is much like Burlington’s – women make up 51% of the population while men make up 49%. The majority of Mercer’s residents, about 30% only have their high school diploma as their highest form of education. The mean household income for Mercer residents is around $76,000 ("Congressional District 4 Profile") (U.S. Census Bureau).

Lastly we will investigate the counties of Monmouth and Ocean, together. Ocean and Monmouth counties both have very large white populations, making up 84% of their combined population of 1,161,130. Latinos have the second biggest population making up 6% of the total population, while African-Americans only make up 5% of the population. The average age of an Ocean and Monmouth County resident is 40 years
old; and like the other counties, there are more women than men - with women making up 52% of the population while men make up 48%. As far as education goes, the majority, about 34%, have only completed high school. The mean household income for both Ocean and Monmouth residents is around $78,000 ("Congressional District 4 Profile") (U.S. Census Bureau).

**Committee Membership**

Chris Smith is affiliated with only one Committee, though it is one he shows great interest in—International Relations. Inside the Committee of International Relations, he is also a part of two subcommittees, the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, and the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. The role of International Relations is for its acting members to act as diplomats to the other countries of the world and to try and create stronger ties with them. The Committee focuses on several topics, but the main ones concern neutrality, international education, foreign loans, diplomatic services and the American National Red Cross. Within International Relations, Smith is very adamant on trying to push legislation through to crack down on human trafficking within the world. He is well known for his work as an opponent of human trafficking and has been dubbed a “champion of global human rights.” The membership of International Relations is split almost right down the middle, comprised of 23 Democrats and 22 Republicans. The Chair of International Relations is Howard L. Berman, a Democratic Representative for the 28th District of California. The ranking minority member of International Relations is Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican Representative for the 18th District of Florida ("Christopher Smith") (House Committee on Foreign Relations).

The main focus of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health is to oversee international health issues and human rights acts in certain regions, particularly Africa. The membership of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health is made up of six Democrats and 5 Republicans. The chair of this subcommittee is Donald M. Payne, a Democratic Representative for the 10th District of New Jersey. The ranking minority member is actually my very own representative, Christopher Smith; so he has seniority over all other republicans on the subcommittee (House Committee on Foreign Relations).

The role of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere is to overlook all of the foreign and local affairs happening within the Western Hemisphere. The membership of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere consists of nine Democrats and seven Republicans. The chair of this subcommittee is Elliot L. Engel, a Democratic Representative for the 17th District of New York. The ranking minority member of this subcommittee is Dan Burton, a Republican Representative for the 5th District of Indiana (House Committee on Foreign Relations).

**Voting on the Issues**

As a representative in Congress, it is Chris Smith’s job to vote on bills. These bills cover a wide array of issues, from gay rights, to education, even Homeland Security. Over the course of the 27 years that Smith has been a representative, he has
voted on countless bills and issues; to cover them all would be timely and probably another paper topic all in itself. So I am going to focus on a few issues he has voted on, and what his current standing is with corresponding interest groups.

To start things off, there is the issue of abortion. Smith has been an active proponent of pro-life policies ever since his induction into Congress, he has voted yes on every single piece of legislature that was proposed to stop abortion, or hinder its use. He has voted no on two pieces of legislation that are related to stem cell research using embryonic cells, which further solidifies his pro-life stance. The two interest groups that correspond to abortion are NARAL pro-choice, and National Right to Life; Smith currently has a 0% approval rating from NARAL and a 100% approval rating from National Right to Life ("Chris Smith on the Issues")

Civil rights is another hot issue in the government these days, especially with the push to make gay marriage legal and equal to that of a marriage between a man and a woman. The few issues that Smith did vote on indicate that he is against the gay agenda. He voted against making adoptions possible with same sex marriages. He also voted yes to the bill to make an amendment banning same-sex marriages and to make marriage to be specifically between a man and a woman. He also voted to do away with affirmative action, and believes that sexual orientation should not be considered in relationship to job discrimination. There are three interest groups connected to civil rights, the American Civil Rights Union, the Human Rights Campaign, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). His approval rating with the American Civil Rights Union is 13%, meaning he is primarily anti-civil rights, on the contrary his approval rating with the NAACP is 47%, which means that he has a mixed stance on affirmative action. Unfortunately, his rating with the Human Rights Campaign is 0%, meaning he is completely against gay rights ("Chris Smith on the Issues") ("Christopher Smith").

With school shootings on the rise ever since Columbine, gun control is becoming an ever popular topic in government these days. Smith currently has a pro-gun control stance. He voted no on a bill to decrease the waiting period to purchase a gun from 3 days to 1, he has also voted no on a repeal to make semi-automatic and large capacity guns legal again. His pro-gun control stance has caused him to have a D+ rating with the National Rifle Association, which is a very prominent interest group connected to gun control ("Chris Smith on the Issues"), ("Chris Smith").

Finally, there is the ever-controversial topic of homeland security. Smith is all about sacrificing privacy to keep the nation safe from terrorist attacks, in fact he voted yes to make the Patriot Act permanent. He has also voted yes on allowing electronic surveillance without authorization, and has also voted yes on allowing the collection of intelligence without regards to civil rights. He has also supported the Iraq war, voting yes on a couple of bills that helped provide money to the war effort, such as $78 billion for the war in Iraq, as well as $266 billion to be used for homeland security. He has also proposed that aviation security be federalized and voted yes on a proposal that airplane pilots be allowed to carry firearms on an airplane. His actions have led him to have a 44% approval rating from Peace Action, which was formally known as The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy (SANE), indicating a mixed record on military issues. He
currently has a 90% approval rating from the American Security Council, indicating that he is all for national defense, no matter what the cost ("Chris Smith on the Issues") ("Chris Smith").

**Bills Proposed**

Aside from voting, a representative’s job in Congress is to propose bills that not only convey the thoughts and beliefs of his/her district, but also that representative’s own concerns. They propose bills in high hopes that they might pass through Congress to one day become law. As stated in the section on committees, Smith has been dubbed the title of “champion of global human rights,” but he didn’t get that title from just anywhere – he received that title based on the bills he has proposed while in office (Congressman Chris Smith).

The bill he is most known for is the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act. This bill proposed to provide sanctuary, aid, and services to those who have escaped the grasps of human trafficking; these benefits are also extended to those stuck within the hell that is human trafficking. This was seen as a landmark bill since most times human trafficking is rarely talked about because many are unaware that it still goes on today, and occurs mainly in secret, underground rings that rarely come to light. It was also a landmark because there was no other bill of its kind prior to it. When a victim escaped trafficking in the past they were left to defend themselves and were usually left homeless. But under this new bill, the government would help trafficking victims get their life back together by giving them protection, amnesty for any wrongdoing while being trafficked, and by prosecuting the traffickers harshly. Smith was very passionate about this law from the start. He put everything he had into getting it passed, and his hard work paid off as it was signed by the President as a law on October 28th, 2000. It has since proven effective; as it opened people’s eyes to the reality that human trafficking does exist and is happening today. This law has helped countless people around the world, not just in America. Since it has proven to be so effective in saving individuals from the horrors of trafficking, this law has been renewed two times, once in 2003 and again in 2005 (Congressman Chris Smith).

Another global human rights bill that Smith sponsored was the Human Rights Restoration Act of 1996. With this bill, Smith essentially wanted to extend a service of goodwill to the rest of the world. Some highlights within the bill include: educational and cultural exchange programs for countries that are not privileged with freedom or democracy as well as the establishment of safe havens and protection for refugees in various countries. It also cut American aid to countries that still partake in forms of slavery and increased the number of scholarships for Tibetan and Burmese students and professionals that are outside of their home countries. This bill promoted human rights, and tried to increase human rights to those not lucky enough to live in countries run by democracy and freedom. Smith did a very good job in sponsoring the bill in Congress, and because of this it was signed into a law by the President on October 19, 1996. It was actually this bill that paved the way and set the foundation for Smith’s landmark Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (Congressman Chris Smith).
While Smith may be a champion of global human rights, he also looks after the rights of war veterans. In 2001 he proposed a bill called the Veterans’ Education and Benefits Expansion Act; its main purpose was to extend better benefits to veterans of the Gulf and Vietnam Wars. Such benefits include a 46% increase in total college benefit over two years, increased home loans in Virginia to veterans from $203,000 to $240,000. It also increased burial and funeral expense benefits by 25% and double burial plot allowances. Lastly, it added certain unexplainable diseases to the service-connected condition list of illnesses for veterans of both the Vietnam and Gulf wars. This bill was well warranted, since the veterans had given everything to protect the rights and freedoms of the American people, and Smith felt that it was the government's turn to take care of the veterans for everything they had done. Congress and the President agreed, and on December 27, 2001 this bill was signed as a law. This was a great victory for veterans, who many came home from the war injured, homeless, and jobless; this law gave them new hope, and a new beginning (Congressman Chris Smith).

**Getting Elected**

Chris Smith has been quite successful at staying in office as he has been the Congressional Representative for the 4th District of New Jersey for about 27 years. His first election, which he lost, was in 1978 against long-time Democratic Representative Frank Thompson Jr, (U.S. House of Representatives). Two years later in 1980 Smith ran against Thompson again, but this time Thompson was in the midst of a bribery and conspiracy scandal and because of this Smith won with 57% of the votes, while Thompson only received 43% (U.S. House of Representatives).

In the 1982 Congressional elections Smith went up against the former President of the N.J. Senate, Democrat Joseph Merlino. Smith was expected to lose since he’d had victory handed to him in his previous campaign against the scandal-ridden Thompson. But fortunately for Smith, Merlino was not the most pleasant man in both demeanor and personality. Merlino's image was gruff and calloused – and his personality wasn't any better either, after a debate Smith went over to Merlino to talk, but Merlino brushed him off saying, “beat it, kid.” Merlino's “tough guy” persona cost him the election. He received only 47% of the votes while Smith won with 53% (U.S. House of Representatives) (“Rep. Christopher Smith”).

In the 1984 Congressional elections Smith went up against a protégé of Merlino, Democrat James Hedden. Hedden tried to tarnish Smith's integrity by saying that he was obsessed with abortion, but it was all for naught. Smith received 61% of the total votes while Hedden only received a measly 39% (U.S. House of Representatives) (“Rep. Christopher Smith”).

In the 1986 Congressional elections Smith went up against Jeffery Laurenti, a Democrat. Smith emerged victorious from this election, getting 61% of the total votes while Laurenti only got 39% (U.S. House of Representatives).

In the 1988 Congressional election, Smith's main opponent was Betty Holland, a Democrat. Though Holland made a valiant effort, she was not able to take Smith out of
office; Smith won the election with 66%, while Holland only had 44% (U.S. House of Representatives).

In the 1990’s there was redistricting done within New Jersey, but it didn't faze Smith. Smith went on to win the 1990 election against Democrat Mark Setaro, by having 63% of the votes, while Setaro only got 37% (U.S. House of Representatives) (“Rep. Christopher Smith”).

The 1992 election brought an interesting opponent, Democrat Brian Hughes. He was the son of the former Democratid governor Richard Hughes. Hughes’ main attack on Smith concerned his fixation on abortion, and how his opposition to it in the House was coming at the cost of local interests. His attacks were not enough however as Smith beat him with 62% of the votes, to Hughes' 38% (U.S. House of Representatives) (“Rep. Christopher Smith”).

The 1994 elections were no different than the others. Smith's opponent was Democrat Ralph Walsh. Smith defeated Walsh by a very large amount, Smith had 68% of the total votes while Walsh only had 32% (U.S. House of Representatives).

Smith's victory streak seemed never ending. The 1996 election wasn't going to do anything to change that as his opponent, Democrat Kevin Meara, only received 34% of the votes – while Smith received 64% (U.S. House of Representatives) (“Rep. Christopher Smith”).

Smith’s victory streak continued to the 1998 election when he went up against Democrat Larry Schneider, Libertarian Keith Quarles, and Independent candidate Morgan Strong. Once again, Smith came out victorious with 62% of the votes, while Schneider only received 62%, and together Quarles and Strong only got 1% of total votes (NJ Division of Elections) (U.S. House of Representatives) (“Rep. Christopher Smith”).

The 2000 elections marked the dawn of a new millennium, but it was business as usual for Smith. He was up for re-election, and this time his opponents were Democrat Reed Gusciora and Independent Stuart Chaifetz. Once again Smith won the election netting 63% of the votes – while Gusciora got 35%, and Chaifetz only got 2% (NJ Division of Elections) (U.S. House of Representatives).

The 2002 elections brought out a lot of opponents for Smith. Smith was up against Democrat Mary Brennan, Independent Keith Quarles, Independent Don Graham, and Independent Hermann Winkelmann. Though Smith had a lot of competition, he still came out victorious. Smith received 66% of the total votes, while Brennan received 32%. Sadly, Quarles only received .8% of the votes, Graham received .5%, and Winkelmann only received .7% (NJ Division of Elections) (U.S. House of Representatives).

When the 2004 elections rolled around, there were still contenders for Smith's Congressional position. Smith had just two opponents in the 2004 elections, a Democrat by the name of Amy Vasquez and a Independent named Richard Edgar. Though both candidates put up a valiant effort, they were no match for the political prowess of Chris Smith. Smith defeated both candidates by receiving 67% of the total votes, Vasquez came in second with 32%, and Edgar only received 1% of the total votes (NJ Division of Elections) (U.S. House of Representatives).
Finally, there is the most recent Congressional election, the 2006 election. There were four people that took part in this election: Republican Christopher Smith, Democrat Carol Gay, Independent Richard Edgar and Independent Louis Wary Jr. Three people were after Smith's position as representative, unfortunately for them though they were not successful in doing so, as Smith also came out victorious in this election, as he has in the past 14 elections of his career. Smith was able to obtain 66% of the total votes, while Gay only received 33%. The Independents didn't fare as well, as Edgar only received .8% of the total votes, and Wary Jr. only got 2% (NJ Division of Elections) (U.S. House of Representatives).

Smith has been in a total of fourteen Congressional Elections, and in each he came out victorious. It's really intriguing because the 4th District of New Jersey leans more to the Democratic side than the Republican, yet Smith keeps on getting re-elected. Perhaps it's the fact that he's a charismatic speaker that appeals to people, or maybe it's his stalwart stance on issues such as abortion, veterans, and global human rights (NJ Division of Elections).

**Interest Group Funding**

Finally, there is the interest group funding that provides the backbone for Chris Smith's elections. About 33% of Chris Smith's total funding has come from interest groups and work unions over the course of this Congressional Representative career, for a total of $1,358,958 campaign contributions. Breaking down the information, interest groups are split into three categories: Business, Labor and Ideological/Single Issues. From that list, about half, 51.5% of the interest groups that contributed to Chris Smith's campaign were labor-affiliated, business gave the second-most, donating 34.8% of the total contributions, and ideological causes came last by only donating 13.6%. Judging from those numbers it's easy to see that a large number of the interest groups that support Smith are related to labor, more precisely, unions (Open Secrets) ("Chris Smith on the Issues").

There are a number of unions that have donated to Smith over the years; the union that has donated the most though is the Building Trade Union, as they have donated $293,399 to Smith of the course of his career. There are other unions that have donated to Smith, such as the Health Professionals with $159,036, the Transportation Unions with $148,855, the Public Sector Unions with $122,465 and Pro-Life Industries with $110,804 (Open Secrets) ("Chris Smith on the Issues").

Since Smith is getting a substantial amount of money from labor unions, one would think that he would vote accordingly so that he would continue to receive their generous contributions. Chris Smith however, does not always vote favorably for unions, in fact he has a 33% rating with the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations), indicating that he has a mixed track record when it comes to voting on union issues. Shockingly, Smith has a better track record with business issues than with labor, and has a rating of 69% with the United States Chamber of Commerce. So it can be said that he has a pro-business stance and yet, business interest groups (34.8%) don't donate nearly as much as labor interest groups (51.5%) do – even though he tends to vote in the best interests of business, not labor.
Lastly, there are the Pro-Life Industries. Smith is a die-hard proponent of pro-life. When it comes to abortion issues, his stance is unwavering. For this reason, of all politicians, he is their top recipient of donations and he returns the favor in kind by voting exactly how they want him to; thus holding a 100% rating with the National Right to Life Committee (Open Secrets) (“Chris Smith on the Issues”).

Despite all of these interest groups, unions and industries providing donations for Smith's elections, a vast majority of Smith's campaign funds comes from individual contributions. Out of Smith's total contributions, 57% of them are from individual contributions, for a total of $2,367,062. It is completely unknown why these individuals have donated to Smith, perhaps he has advocated their interests in the past, or maybe they were trying to influence him to vote differently in the future. Given New Jersey's history of political corruption, it can't be ruled out that perhaps some of the individual contributors had their own agendas (Open Secrets).

Though faced with many challenges throughout his career, Christopher Smith used hard work and determination to work his way up to where he is today. Smith started out from humble beginnings in Rahway. He worked diligently through high school and college, up until his first Congressional election. Though he lost, he did not let that get the best of him. Two years later he won his first election and became the Congressional Representative for the 4th District of New Jersey. Some say, that the election was handed to him due to him going up against a scandal-ridden opponent, but he proved himself in the next Congressional election when he defeated the expected winner: Merlino. Smith came into politics as an underdog with no prior political experience. He was young, and he was a Republican candidate in a primarily Democratic district, but even when faced against all those odds, Smith pressed forward. Smith has made good use of his time in office, as he has done great things for war veterans and global human rights; and he continues to be the stalwart defender of pro-life ideals within Congress. Smith's unwavering loyalty to the people of his district is what makes him such a wonderful representative, and that is why I am proud to call him my Congressional representative.

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