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THE INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S
OFFICE IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

By

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Undergraduate Professional Paper

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Degree—Bachelor of Arts
in Major—Political Science

University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Official Graduation Date: December 2015

Approved by:

Dr. Sara Rinfret, Faculty Mentor
Political Science

ABSTRACT

Duffin, Hailey, Bachelors of Arts, December 2015

Political Science

The Influential Role of the Secretary of State's Office

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Sara Rinfret

The purpose of this research is to provide a cross-state comparison of the role that the Secretaries of State play in their given state as well as the influence it has on national politics. In order to evaluate the role of the Secretary of State, this research will examine states in the Northwest region of the U.S. (i.e. Pacific Northwest) to determine how their formal and informal powers affect their role in their respective state. The driving research question is: what role does this position play in impacting state and national electoral politics in the U.S? In an attempt to address this question, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with staff at the five offices in the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, public administration theory will be applied as a descriptive framework to examine the interview responses. The Secretary of State's office is an agency that 47 out of the 50 states in United States have in their government – this office can play an essential role in defining U.S. elections and politics more broadly. Moreover, 12 out of the 47 states that have a Secretary of State either appoint via governor or state legislature, while the remainder of the states elects their Secretary of State via the general public. The duties and level of participation of the Secretary of State's office varies based on the state's government and the powers that have been allotted to them by their respective state constitution. This research will provide a first hand account of the work that is being done in each office and the broader societal implications.

The Influential Role of the Secretary of State's Office in the Pacific Northwest

In an effort to determine what characteristics need to be present in office of the secretary of state in order to be considered successful I focused my research on the electoral systems, laws and secretary of state's offices in these five states: Montana, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Wyoming. This region with its diverse population lent itself well to analyzing the office and its ability to govern and incite change within the state and on a national level. The Secretary of State's office is elected by the public in 35 of the 47 states that have the office; in the other 12 states the office is appointed either by the legislature or the governor. All offices in this region are elected and serve up to two, four-year terms.

Literature Review

To begin, it is first important to offer a brief overview of what a Secretary of State does in the United States. The exact job duties of the office of the Secretary of State varies depending on the state because their powers are given to them by each State's Constitution. However, there are general themes that most secretaries are tasked with possibly the most important being conducting all statewide elections and helping the counties when they are tasked with conducting local elections. Along with this the Secretary of States is often tasked with certifying businesses, notaries, keeping state records, and other smaller duties such as the keeper of the state seal.

Beyond textbook definitions of the inner-workings of a secretary or state, there has been little research to date about the role that this office can have in shaping political outcomes beyond newspaper articles. For example, in examining newspaper articles within the last year, the attention is often due to scandal. In terms of the Montana Secretary of State Linda McCulloch, we saw focus on her during her battle with Republican counterparts on LR126 to end same day voter registration and her defending her actions after a college used the state seal on a partisan mailer without approval. In the case of Oregon we saw great media attention when the governor was found to have scandal and Secretary Kate Brown became Governor Brown.

Nonetheless, there has been little academic research in regards to the role that the Secretary of State's office plays and, I speculate that this because there is so much flexibility in the existence of the office and the range of duties that it takes on. However, I posit that we can garner important insight from the research of Robert Crew (1992) and his model on gubernatorial success. Crew's (1992) work posits that there are five major categories to determine if a

governor will be successful. These five factors include: personality, political skill, resources, situation, and strategy.

Crew puts forth the notion that personality plays a role as it helps to understand the individual behavior of the governor therefore explaining the actions they make in their road to success and failure. “Perception and inclination created as one adapts to the situations of his or her life.” (Crew, Pg. 210) This personality factor is broken up into three different categories with a cognitive component, the motivations, as well as character. The cognitive styles encompass how the governor thinks things through, looking at and examining the governor’s speeches, interviews and the other forms of communication in an effort to analyze their personal styles. The motivations simply take into consideration the reasoning that each governor has; these motivations drive their actions in the governor’s office. The character is also necessary in considering how the personality of the governor affects success. (Crew, Pg. 210-211)

The second factor is political skill; to have gubernatorial success it is necessary to have the ability to positively present oneself especially in the technologically advanced world we live in today, as well as, being able to effectively use formal and informal types of power. Crew also stated “A successful governor also possesses the skill and will engage in the elemental activities of public life ‘persuading, bargaining, battling, compromising, co-opting, committing, catering, arm twisting’ and public rhetoric. Experience in government helps one develop these skills and assists one in confronting and dealing with the ambiguities, pressures, and uncertainties of the job.” (Crew, Pg. 210)

The third factor in gubernatorial success is the nature of resources or capital available to the governor; these resources can come in many different forms. One form of resources is the size and loyalty of their party support and the governor depends on the resources of having this party support to back him in the legislature, with public approval, as well in his professional reputation. There is also a need for the resource of “time, attention, and political influence.” (Crew Pg. 210) Paul Light put forth the idea that political resources come in two forms, internal and external resources. “The internal packet includes the resources like time, information, expertise and energy. The external packet reflects the incumbent’s political strength and includes party support in the legislature, public approval, electoral margin, and professional reputation.” (Crew, Pg. 212)

The fourth factor is situation and context; this contributes to the governor's success because the opportunities or roadblocks that are present in the given situation structure the nature of the situation that he or she faces. There are two major contexts that can structure the situation, those being state economic conditions as well as the political environment. The "gubernatorial priorities and strategies are constrained or enlarged by economic circumstances" this is because the furthering of successful goals, promises, and policy changes are often predicated on the existence of a full and expansive budget. The political environment also prominently structures the context of a governor's success with "a distribution of partisanship and political ideology within a state and as a sequence of changes in the nature of the political time." (Crew, Pg. 213) This meaning that the ideological predispositions of the state can structure with either a further or a hindrance of the governor's personal agenda as it gives their goals a context of either support or opposition from the get go.

The fifth and final factor, strategy, is considered to be the "specific means chosen to implement his or her expressed goals and intentions." (Crew, Pg. 214) This factor is the deliberate choices made by the governor to best direct their own thinking choices and behavior in order to further the success of the office. Each governor has their own distinct way of approaching the opportunities and problems of the office and "his way is bound to capitalize on what he is good at, to minimize what he is not good at." (Crew, Pg. 214) The ability to determine the best possible strategy for the given office based on the strengths and weaknesses of the person in the governor's seat is beneficial. Without the best framing and the taking or opportunities success will be virtually impossible. (Crew, Pg. 214)

Crew takes these five elements I have described and says that they work simultaneously together to determine the successfulness of a governor. I argue that this model can be adapted to examine the role of a state's secretary of state. The five categories would remain the same, but the definition of each category has changed due to the job duties of a secretary of state. We see this primarily do to the different roles that these two agencies play, the governor is more influenced by the budgetary concerns and has more free reign over policy where as the secretary relies more heavily on the other branches of government. More specifically, Table 1 lists each of the five categories and a brief explanation.

Figure 2: Secretarial Success

Personality	Personality impacts the entire agency and policy directions
Political Skill	The Secretary must have the skills to get elected
Resources	Secretaries need political support from other branches of government and political party to further their own policy and internal resources like time and information
Situation	Success is constrained by the political majority of the other departments and whether they align with the goals of the secretary's office
Strategy	Must have the ability to manipulate and craft a political strategy

Source: Hailey Duffin's model Adapted from Robert Crew's Gubernatorial Success model (1992)

First, the personality of the individual who is the sitting secretary of state can change the entire dynamic of the office as well as the policy choices they make. Based on the ideological personality qualities of the head of the agency the direction that the office and the electoral system of the state goes can change dramatically. Second, the political skill is important for the Secretary of state for a few reasons. The secretary, like a governor has to have the political skill to get elected to the office in the first place in 35 states, and in the other 12 states the secretary must have the political ability to be chosen for an appointment. Once they have utilized their skill to get in the office it is necessary to also have this ability to further their policy agenda.

Third, we have resources, which is one of the most important elements for the Secretary of State's office as the success of the office is directly related to the kind and amount of resources available. The secretary's office needs the external resource of political support from other branches and the people because the secretary cannot get policy into law with out the help of these other branches. The internal resources like time, information, expertise, and energy carry through as necessities in the secretary's office just like in the governor's. Fourth, the success that the secretary can obtain has a lot to do with the situation that the state is in during the time. While the governor is tied to the economic situation the secretary is tied primarily to the political make-up of the state and whether the majorities align with their own political ideals. Lastly, we discussed the reliance that the secretary has on the political make-up of the state but none of this matters if they are not able to construct and effectively execute a great strategy. The secretary

must be able to utilize many strategic moves including but not limited to lobbying, timing, and the use of political connections.

Results and Analysis

In order to best analyze the offices of the Secretary of States in the Northwest Region I employed a qualitative approach. When performing my research I examined primary documents to obtain essential background information (e.g. government documents, white papers, policy memos) about each secretary of state.

To examine each secretary of state, I employed an elite interview approach. In particular, I conducted semi-structured phone interview in 4 of the 5 states discussed here. The questions focused on concepts like the duties that the Secretaries and their office have, what changes they want in regards to what they are currently working on to make their state's system better and what changes they would like to see happen if they could. I also discussed how the electoral system works and its effectiveness, along with the effect that their office has on national elections and other varying questions that contributed to a more conversational structure. For a full list of questions that were used as a guide to the conversation during the interviews refer to Appendix 1.

I spoke with Secretary of State Linda McCulloch from Montana, Secretary of State Lawrence Denney from Idaho, the Certification and Training Director Sheryl Moss from Washington, and State Election Director Peggy Nighswonger from Wyoming. Unfortunately I was unable to reach anyone in the Oregon office, due to the amount of flux in the office. More specifically, as of February 2015 Secretary Kate Brown became Governor Brown and the secretary seat sat vacant until March 2015 when Jeanne Atkins was appointed into the position as a caretaker until the formal election takes place in 2016. To supplement the information received directly from each office I used recognized media sources, like the *Oregonian* and National Public Radio, to examine the coverage of the each office.

I found the elite interview approach to be the most effective form of research because they are the ones that are aware of the details, the inner working, and the obstacles that the office faces. There have been studies conducted that have found these elite interviews in a conversational style are effective and powerful research tools as they “put the respondents at ease and elicit thoughtful and, where appropriate, complex answers to questions.” (Aberbach, Pg. 3)

These procedures “allow for the exploration of subtlety and nuance; they enable an investigator to assess not just the surface content of a response but also the reasoning and premises underlying it... While the open-ended, quasi-conversational technique maximizes the interviewer’s ability to clarify, illuminate, or probe more deeply into the responses of the subject it also means that questions are not asked always in the same way” which is accurate in this case. (Aberbach, Pg. 3) My questions allowed me room to probe into what the true meanings of what the interviewee was saying, however, I have referred to the questions as an aid to the conversation because in the best form of elite interviews as discussed here you can not take the interviews in the same linear fashion and expect the most thoughtful answers.

Case Selection

This region was selected for a variety of reasons; as this is the region I grew up in and now attend college the ease to access was important. The variety of demographics of the region were also essential to the region choice ranging from one of the most conservative states, Wyoming, all the way to Oregon who is seen as one of the most liberal states and everything in between like we have here in Montana with a very diverse electorate. This region also has a great representation of urban and rural populations with places like the countryside of eastern Montana or Wyoming and the cities like Seattle and Portland.

This paper next turns to the analysis of the interview data by using Crew’s model as a descriptive framework to analyze the results. More specifically, the interview data is examined through the lens of the secretarial success model (See Figure 2).

Understanding the Secretary of State

The five offices I researched had the same goal to increase the voter turn out and make the voting process easier for all eligible citizens including military, youth, elderly, and the minority through programs like online components, absentee accessibility, along with many others. Seeing the consistency and briefly looking at the office as whole across the country I believe it would be safe to say all 47 secretary of state offices in the United States have roughly this same goal. Though this may be the ultimate goal in all state’s secretary of state offices all states are at different places in their success of this goal. Along with their attempt to reach this

goal each state pushes to reach it at different levels and has different roadblocks that are contributing to their degree of success. Before delving into the interview data, it is important to provide a brief overview of each secretary of state, beginning with Montana.

The Secretary of State in the state of Montana, currently Linda McCulloch who has held this office since 2008, has a diverse job description that takes on many tasks; all tasks that her office takes on she is responsible for heading and ensuring success. In terms of the Elections and Government Services division the office is given the role of administering, controlling, and overseeing all elections in the state as well as the regulation of all voter registration. They also have the Administrative Rules Service division, the Business Services division, the Notary and Certification Services division, and the Records and Information Management division.

(Welcome to the Montana..., McCulloch) The elections are currently done with polls with the option of no-reason absentee in most elections with 60% of the people choosing to vote absentee, however, the municipal, special and most school elections are done entirely through an absentee system. The state of Montana also has maintained their same day voter registration laws after a heated statewide highly partisan battle over LR126, which decided whether or not to make the change and set a deadline for registration as the Friday prior to elections.

The Washington secretary, Republican Kim Wyman since 2012, is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing and certifying the elections throughout the state. The office also registers and oversees corporations and charities within the state, as well as, many other miscellaneous duties like the state archives, the state library, chairing the state productivity board and others. The current system in Washington is based on an all mail-in elections system and a top two primary system where the two that get the most votes get to go on to the general election.

The Secretary of State's office in Oregon is under going a great deal of change right now, the current Secretary is Jeanne Atkins who was appointed by the former Secretary and recently sworn in Governor Kate Brown. Brown was quick to find someone to head the office of the Secretary because it has a great deal of responsibility in the state of Oregon. The office houses the Archives Division, the Audits Division, Corporation Division, the Executive Division, as well as the Elections Division. Oregon's election system is set up with a primary and a general election; they also have a closed primary where the party affiliation is required.

The Secretary of State in Idaho, Secretary Lawrence Denney, was sworn into this office only this year (2015), however, he spent many years in the House of Representatives including

three terms as the speaker. The current electoral system in Idaho is set up with a closed primary as of 2012 and a standard general election.

The Secretary of State in Wyoming took office this year (2015) and is Republican Edward Murray, whose office is in charge of the Elections Division, the Business Division, the Administrative Services Division, as well as the Compliance Division. The current system is set up a closed top two primary, but the party affiliation can be changed day of election, and a standard general election. They allow same day voter registration in all elections except the special elections. Wyoming has also had no excuse absentee since 1991; however, they do not offer early voting or DMV registration in any capacity.

Personality

McCulloch (MT) has a personality of a more progressive democrat who then takes the office as a whole and the policies it fights for in a more progressive manner with bills like online voter registration and an all mail system. Wyman's (WA) personality has created an environment of stagnation with less progressive policies like making the write in process on ballots more efficient when counted at the forefront of her policy agenda. Atkins (OR) has a progressive personality like we see throughout the rest of the state. This personality of progressiveness can be seen office and state wide with the recent implementation of the first ever DMV registration, meaning in the state of Oregon when someone renews or gets a drivers license or identification card the person will be automatically registered to vote taking away that barrier to elections that we see in less progressive office environments and states. As a Republican, Secretary Denney (ID) fits into the personality of the state as a whole but his personality truly effects the direction of the office. As a conservative head of the agency the office is not pushing for any revolutionary or even moderate policies that would make their system more accessible just as the personality of the previous republicans have ensured. The personality of the republican secretary Murray (WY) that is aligned with the state politics has an effect on the progressiveness of the office. When asked what the Secretary's office was working on for the future she just noted that making the primary system more open so that minor or provisional candidates had a chance to be on the primary ballot was important moving forward indicating little for progressive policy changes.

By way of summary, we see that all of the five secretaries have the capacity to change the environment of their office and in turn the state's election system by their personality alone. The question then simply comes in play, what do they do with this power? Those that are most effective in putting into place the policy to further their goal are those that create a more progressive and forward moving environmental personality.

Political Skill

McCulloch (MT) flourished in the political skill to get elected, this is her second term in the secretary of states office and has held other statewide elected positions. In terms of the political skill necessary to get their policy agenda moving forward McCulloch has had a hard time, not necessarily due to her lack of skill but more due to some of the other factors we will discuss. For Washington we see political skill as Secretary Wyman obviously succeeded in being elected to the office. When speaking with Ms. Moss, Washington's State Certification and Training Officer, they did not appear to be very worried about their policy agenda and the possibility that it may not be implemented, indicating political skill. Due to the unusual circumstances of this particular situation with appointment the political skill is not very important as Secretary Atkins (OR) did not have to go through the formal election process and has no intention of doing so in 2016. The necessary political skill in this situation comes from the actions that led her to the point of being what Governor Brown considered to be the best choice. In terms of political skill Secretary Denney (ID) needed this skill to get elected to the office as a whole, however, with an overwhelming republican dominated political system he will not have to work extensively to have support in his policy. The political skill for Murray beyond the initial election is not as important due to the vast republican majority in Wyoming; however, despite this majority the election policies in place are surprisingly open with concepts like same day voter registration and no excuse absentee.

Nonetheless, in order to become a Secretary of State the candidate already has the political skill to obtain such an office in most if not all cases. The extent of their skill is then what carries through and is what truly affects them once in office and is the factor that is used to distinguish between them.

Resources

The internal resources are available to Secretary McCulloch (MT) but the external resources are a problem. As previously discussed, the secretary needs the resource of political support and though she has the support of the democratic governor the legislature is dominated by the opposing republican party who offers little to no support to her agenda. The internal resources like time and energy are available to Secretary Wyman (WA) as are the more external resources like political support. Washington politics is split fairly evenly with the Republicans controlling the Senate by a margin of 1 and the Democrats controlling the House by a margin of 4 and a Democratic governor. This gives Secretary Wyman the resource of political support within the Senate and a close minority in the house. Secretary Atkins (OR) has all the resources she could possibly need at her fingertips. She has the internal resources of an expansive staff with time and information and all the possible external resources she could have with a heavily democratic controlled house and senate and a democratic governor who appointed her to that position, meaning she obviously gives her all the support she can. The resources are abundant for Secretary Denney (ID) just like we saw in Oregon; he has immense political support from all angles including the overwhelmingly republican legislature, governor and the public. Due to the political alignment throughout the state the resources available to Murray (WY) are extensive; as is the situation with a friendly legislature and agreeable governor and public.

All 5 states have the internal resources of time, staff, and things of that nature. The true distinction is when looking at the resources available to them outside of their own office; in this case it is those that have the political support and backing from the other branches of government like we see in Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming.

Situation

The biggest hindrance to Secretary McCulloch's (MT) success is the situation that she has found herself in this session primarily. During the elections in November 2014 Montana was highly divided on the Legislative Referendum 126, which would eliminate same day voter registration in the state of Montana. Secretary McCulloch came out in full force against this change in the states election laws. When speaking with her she said that due to this political move the Republican led legislature is now punishing her with a total

blackout of all policies that she is trying to push forth to make the system better and more efficient. This political set up is also a big part of the situation that Secretary Wyman's (WA) office finds herself in with a majority in the Senate and the prospect for being able to get policy through the close House. Going on from the very friendly political environment we see a great situation for Secretary Atkins (OR) as she can forge forward with progressive revolutionary electoral policies like the DMV registration that create the most open electoral system that our country has seen. The situation for Secretary Denney (ID) is very much in his favor as he has a set up that offers him an easy scenario for him to align his goals with those of the rest of the state. The complete political alignment in the state of Wyoming allows Murray a situation with a friendly legislature and agreeable governor and public and therefore the ability to make virtually any political move desired.

By way of summary, we see that the most effective situations are those secretaries that have congruent political beliefs with the rest of their state's government and the general public; we see this most prominently in Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming.

Strategy

Due to this situation the strategy that McCulloch (MT) employs has little importance. Though she works hard to lobby and further her agenda with no support from the outside there is little she can do. Due to the split political situation the way that Secretary Wyman (WA) executes her strategy is crucial because without an effective strategy she won't be able to pass the house or get the governor to sign. However, this does not seem to be much of a worry for her in this session because the Secretary's office is not trying to further any controversial policies. The strategy for Atkins (OR) moving forward with policy is not as important in this situation as it would be in a more politically split state. Regardless of the strategy that the secretary uses she will not have to sway opposition to vote for her policy agendas. Along with this political breakup that aligns with Secretary Denney (ID), like we saw with Oregon the strategy for getting his policy passed is not as important as it would be if there was more political competition because his party will back him up rather than his having to strategically convince opponents. The same concept holds true with Murray (WY) with the political alignment there is not a need for much when it comes to extensive strategizing.

The Secretary of State offices not only have a great deal of effect on their individual states but they can affect politics on a national level as well, though the states are all very different they all have a different way of influencing elections and politics on a broader scale. One way that the Pacific Northwest states are coming together to effect elections is by working to get the five primaries at the same time so that National candidates have an incentive to come and campaign in this region of the United States rather than sticking to the East and Midwestern swing states. There are states within this region like Oregon, Washington and in some respects Montana that are seen as and have more progressive policies, which allow them to become models for other state and even federal laws to use a model and a test zone before implementing it at home or on a wider scale. Washington and I assume, Oregon mentioned that they get calls with questions from other states about the progress and the successfulness of policies. Also on the grounds of advice Wyoming is seen as one of the key states when it comes to advice on how policies would affect a smaller rural state. As a whole the five states all have effects when it comes to the National Association of Secretaries of State, when they all have access to each other and as whole can make quite an impact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, several themes have emerged from this research. First, success in the secretary of state's office truly takes a combination of these characteristics - a progressive personality, great political skills, access to internal and external resources, a favorable situation and a strategy that highlights the secretary's best qualities.

Second, each Secretary of State demonstrated all of these characteristics to some extent. However, as we have seen throughout the results, the most successful secretaries of state are those that are ideologically aligned with the political majority within their individual state. We saw this with Idaho and Republican Secretary Denney being perfectly content with the current system because he is aligned with the state and agrees with what they have done for many years. The same general concept applies with those that are led by a democratic majority; for example we saw the fluidity and ease that states like Oregon can pass policies through their system. To demonstrate this point one step further there are states like Montana who sit still in gridlock with no forward movement in making our elections system better because the political alignment is so

dramatically split and rather than working for the betterment of the state they are “punishing” for political moves.

In closing, it is essential to remember moving forward the significance that the Secretary of State can have on the election system both state and nation wide. We must also begin to focus more on this office and ask if they are doing their job in an effective manner, or in a way that is best for the state over which they preside. This will require a focusing of the political research on this important office, however, through this paper I hope to have sparked the discussion for further research and development of such a powerful, yet overlooked state office.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions used to aid the conversation

- 1) What is your formal job description?
- 2) How long have you worked in this position?
- 3) What brought you to this area of work, or wanting to pursue this career path?
- 4) What education have you had that prepared you for this position?
- 5) What does your job entail on a day-to-day basis? Your daily routine?
- 6) What is your role in keeping the mechanics of the overall department running?
- 7) What is the overall job of the Secretary of State's office?
- 8) How is the electoral system set-up in [insert state]?
- 9) Do you believe that the current state electoral system is an effective one?
- 10) What do you think needs to be changed within the electoral system?
- 11) How do you go about making changes to the current policy?
- 12) What do you believe is the effect, if any, that your office has on nation-wide electoral policies?
- 11) What would you suggest for congress or the legislature to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of your department?
- 12) Do you agree that the Secretary of State's position should be an elected position or should it be appointed position as it is in other states?
- 13) Is there anything else you would like to add or feel that we haven't adequately covered throughout the interview?