

## **The Politics of Military Service Pensions in the Antebellum U.S. Congress**

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In this paper, we investigate the rise of federal military pensions in the United States before the Civil War. We find that what began as a relatively simple program to provide for veterans' war-time disabilities grew into a mass entitlement program based on military service. We adopt an analytic narrative approach to examine the political responses of members of Congress to external pressures for Revolutionary War service pensions. We argue that distributive interests, coupled with fiscal policies that exacerbated sectional animosities, significantly shaped the adoption and evolution of military pension legislation. Two cases are of particular interest – the Pension Acts of 1818 and 1832 – and we examine the politics of each in detail. In the end, we contend that our analysis is crucial for understanding American political development more generally, in that the history of Civil War pensions, as well as the early emergence of wide-scale particularism in congressional policy-making, cannot be fully appreciated without incorporating their antebellum foundations.

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## I. Introduction

The provision of pensions to disabled veterans, their widows, and surviving dependents has been a recurring topic facing Congress in the aftermath of various military conflicts throughout American history. While a seemingly innocuous issue today, such was not the case in the 18th and 19th centuries. Conflict over military pensions during this period frequently engendered stark sectional and partisan conflicts, and the payment of benefits often consumed a large share of the federal budget. Interestingly, a common series of events characterizes many of these episodes, as Congress initially moved to implement a limited pension system for war-related death or disability only to see an onslaught of claims to expand benefits in the years following the cessation of conflict. By and large, majorities in Congress responded favorably to these pressures.

While scholars in a number of fields have begun to piece together the events surrounding these histories, with much of the attention focusing on the Civil War and the roots of social welfare policy more generally, there has been comparatively little analysis of the congressional response to pension claims arising from military conflicts during the antebellum era. For example, scholars have noted the comparatively small scale of the revolutionary war pension scheme relative to the system applied to Union Army (UA) veterans (see, e.g., Skocpol 1992). Yet the degree to which the antebellum era provided a foundation for the distributive politics associated with post-Civil War pension policies is largely unknown. And a casual glance at the history surrounding the former suggests certain similarities with the more well-known accounts of the later period. Fifty years after the respective wars, each program affected a similar share of the population, and pension expenditures as a share of the federal budget were strikingly similar. Of course, UA pensions were extended to more veterans much earlier in their lives than were

Revolutionary pensions. Similarly, pensions as a share of the budget were typically more significant in the former.

More important for our purposes, however, are the parallel *political* histories of these two chapters of development. In each case, what began as a relatively simple program of invalid pensions grew into a mass entitlement based on military service. In this paper, we apply an analytic narrative approach to explicate the political motivations arising from the particularistic nature of congressional responses to pressure for service pensions in the antebellum period. We argue that distributive interests, coupled with fiscal policies that exacerbated sectional animosities, significantly shaped the adoption and evolution of military pensions. Thus, the history of Civil War pensions, as well as the early emergence of wide-scale particularism, cannot be fully appreciated without incorporating their antebellum foundations.

## **II. A Short History of Military Pension Legislation before 1818**

The history of military pensions in the United States traces its origins to the very beginnings of the nation.<sup>1</sup> The first national pension law was passed in the early stages of the Revolutionary War, on August 26, 1776, and promised half pay for life to all officers, soldiers, and sailors who were injured in battle, to the point where they could not maintain an independent livelihood. A revision to this law was made in 1778, extending the benefits of the 1776 law to those who had been injured prior to its enactment; this revision essentially covered all those who were injured since the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 9, 1775. A further revision occurred in 1782, clarifying the options that wounded personnel had available to them (a position in the “Invalid Corp” or discharge with a small monthly pension). Thus, the basis of early pension legislation was geared toward the relief of invalids, wherein the Federal government

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<sup>1</sup> The basis for much of this section comes from Glasson (1900; 1918).

accepted responsibility for the disabilities combatants incurred as a result of the war with the British.

A parallel pension track also emerged in the 1770s, that of service-related pensions. Here, advocates, such as General George Washington, pointed to the British system, in which officers would receive half pay for life, upon completion of some term of service. The suggestion in the States was that Revolutionary War officers should be granted a similar half-pay pension for life, should they remain in service to the nation through completion of the war. A suggestion was also made for the creation of a Pension Office, staffed by a commissioner and clerks, to process pension claims. Rather than immediately acquiesce, Congress debated the issue, and a series of heated discussions took place. Opposition to the half-pay service pension emerged, as concerns about “privilege,” “fairness,” and the “creation of class of placemen” were raised. Eventually, Congress passed a compromise law on May 15, 1778, which instituted a half-pay service pension for officers, to take effect at the conclusion of the war, but limited its coverage to seven years. A follow-up law in 1780 extended these half-pay provisions to the widows of officers killed in battle.

These, then, were the two tracks that would define pension legislation into the nineteenth century. Minor alterations were made in the administration of pensions in 1792, 1803, and 1805, before a major reorganization of invalid pension policy was carried out in 1806. Service pensions failed to gain additional traction, however. Charity and just compensation for disabilities incurred in wartime were viewed as the appropriate response by the government; rewards couched in terms of “gratitude for service” only produced contentious discussions and cries of extortion. Service-related pensions were not dead, however, and their reemergence

would come in the context of furthering “national harmony.” Their adoption (and furtherance over time) would result from more particularistic motives.

### **III. The Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818 and Its Aftermath**

After his election to the Presidency in November 1816, James Monroe toured the nation, reveling in his victory amid adoring crowds. During his victory lap, Monroe basked in the patriotism of the time, as citizens cheered the end of the War of 1812 and hearkened back to the inspiration of the revolutionary generation. Monroe, a Revolutionary War veteran himself, played up these patriotic feelings and underscored the centrality of the revolutionary generation, especially the war veterans, in the birth and development of the constitutional nation. This patriotic fervor also served his general political interests, that is, of producing a nation free of party strife that would lead to a lengthy “era of good feelings” (Hofstadter 1969).

Once in office, Monroe continued to promote his idea of non-partisan unification, and saw the patriotism inherent in the revolutionary spirit as an effective tool. During his travels, Monroe was occasionally approached by Revolutionary War veterans, often infirm and indigent, in search of Federal relief (Resch 1999). He made no commitment to them at the time, but listened with a sympathetic ear and considered their plight with an opportunistic gaze. Fairly quickly, he saw the travails of the veterans as a useful issue to undergird his call for national unity and made it an important plank in his opening message to Congress in December 1817. Monroe asked Congress for Federal pension legislation for indigent Revolutionary War veterans, many of whom were not covered under existing federal or state laws, stating: “These men have a claim on the gratitude of their country, and it will do honor for their country to provide for them” (*Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 12/2/1817, p. 19).<sup>2</sup> Adding to Monroe’s enthusiasm for a new

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<sup>2</sup> The full text of Monroe’s message to Congress appears in *Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 12/2/1817, pp. 12-19.

pension policy for veterans was the “prosperous and happy condition” of the nation, as the federal surplus was considerable thanks to post-war tax revenues and the passage of a new protective tariff in 1816.<sup>3</sup>

Monroe’s address, and especially his call for increased aid for veterans, was warmly received by the membership of the 15th Congress. Almost 70 percent of the members were new, voted in to office in large part as a refutation of the acts of the previous Congress, specifically, the choice by members of the 14th Congress to vote themselves a sizeable (and retroactive) pay raise (see Bianco, Spence, and Wilkerson 1996).<sup>4</sup> Thus, as the 15th Congress began, members were looking for opportunities to give to constituents, rather than risk being (in some way) as giving to themselves. A new pension policy for veterans seemed to be just what the doctor ordered.

Action on a new policy began in the House. A seven-man committee, chaired by Joseph Bloomfield (DR-N.J.), was appointed to prepare pension legislation in accordance with the President’s message (*Annals*, 15-1, 12/3/1817, p. 405).<sup>5</sup> Bloomfield was a Revolutionary War veteran, and his selection as chairman was seen as an indication of the House’s desire to secure passage of new pension bill. Less than ten days later, Bloomfield’s committee reported out a bill that would create the first general service-related pension in U.S. history. Any soldier who served in the Revolutionary War – whether in the army, a militia, or in a state unit – and who was either reduced to indigence or unable to support himself through his own labor, would receive half-pay based on rank held during the war for the entirety of life (*Annals*, 15-1,

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<sup>3</sup> Quote taken from Monroe’s message, *Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 12/2/1817, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> The actual turnover between the 14th and 15th Congress was 68.7 percent. This was a significant increase over the typical House turnover levels of the time, which were between 40 and 50 percent (see Fiorina, Rohde, and Wissel 1975). Also, it should be noted that constituents did not penalize members of the 14th Congress indiscriminately, but rather punished incumbents disproportionately based on their support of the congressional pay raise (Bianco, Spence, and Wilkerson 1996).

<sup>5</sup> “DR” indicates that an individual was a member of the Democratic-Republican Party, whereas an “F” indicates membership in the Federalist Party.

12/12/1817, p. 445). Thus, pensions would be granted to veterans regardless of their length or type of service. It was not wholly a service pension *per se*, as there was a distinct indigence (or “poor law”) component, and veterans were required to present proof of their “incapacity” (as well as their service record) to a Federal judge before being placed on the pension rolls. Still, the bill’s general thrust was to reward service, rather than provide charity for invalidity, which had been the basis of most pension policies of the past.

Discussion of the Bloomfield committee bill began in earnest on Friday, December 19, 1817. Concerns were raised by Rep. John Linn (DR-N.J.) about the costs of the pension program, and he moved that eligibility be limited to those men who served in the Continental army. Bloomfield quickly assuaged Linn’s fears, and those of others, about the costs of the program, suggesting that his estimates placed the necessary appropriation within manageable parameters, especially at a time when the nation’s Treasury was so flush with revenues. However, Rep. William Henry Harrison (DR-Oh.) touched on Linn’s argument from a different angle, arguing that certain individuals should be limited in their eligibility for a pension, not due to concerns regarding program costs, but because their service was not sufficient in comparison to many who fought in the war. Harrison suggested that a requirement of six months of military service was prudent, so as to honor the sacrifice of “true” veterans. Additional discussion was had, but no vote was taken; the committee asked leave to sit again, and it was granted.<sup>6</sup>

The debate was taken up again on Monday, December 22, 1817, when Rep. John Strother (DR-Va.) gained the floor. Strother was incensed by the arguments made by Linn and Harrison, and bristled at the suggestion that militia and state troops, even short-timers, would be excluded from the pension rolls. The bulk of said militia and state troops were from the Mid-Atlantic and South, underscoring Strother’s resistance to their exclusion (Resch 1988, p. 143). Strother went

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<sup>6</sup> For the full debate, see *Annals*, 15-1, 12/19/1817, pp. 491-94.

on to attack the contributions made by the army during the war, and played up the contributions of the militia and state troops. Not to be undone, Harrison responded by moving an amendment to the committee bill, calling for pensions to be granted only to those who were part of the “military establishment” at the end of the war or who had served previously for at least three years (*Annals*, 15-1, 12/22/1817, p. 499). Bloomfield, sensing the issue getting away from the committee, asked leave to sit again, which was granted.

The debate picked up the following day, Tuesday, December 23, 1817, and Harrison’s amendment was taken up and rejected.<sup>7</sup> Discussion continued, and additional amendments were offered. One amendment that was successful was offered by Rep. Albion Parris (DR-Mass.), who added officers and mariners who served in the navy to the list eligible for pensions (*Annals*, 15-1, 12/23/1817, p. 508). Just as the proceedings appeared to be winding down, Rep. William Lowndes (DR-S.C.) gained the floor and moved to recommit the bill to committee, with instructions to install a three-year service requirement for pension eligibility, along the lines proposed by Harrison earlier (*Annals*, 15-1, 12/24, 1817, p. 509). This requirement was quickly amended down to one year, but the fate of the legislation was in doubt, as supporters of the original bill feared that recommitment could result in additional provisions being tacked on (Resch 1999, p. 105).

These fears, however, proved to be unfounded. Rep. Richard Johnson (DR-Ky.) was recognized and made an impassioned speech to preserve the sanctity of the committee bill, urging members to forsake their squabbles and keep in mind that the deserving veterans had waited long enough for their rewards. After some additional debate, the recommitment motion was easily defeated by a roughly three-to-one margin, and the committee bill, only lightly amended to

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<sup>7</sup> Not vote tally is reported in the *Annals*.



include navy personnel, was “decided in the affirmative without a division” (*Annals*, 15-1, 12/24/1817, p. 512).<sup>8</sup>

The Senate, however, would prove to be a major hurdle for pension legislation. The House bill, once passed, was referred to the Senate Committee on Military Affairs. On January 19, 1822, the committee reported back an amended bill, limiting benefits to those who were either “active” at the end of the war or had served for at least a three-year period during the course of the war. Moreover, benefits were limited to *army and navy veterans*, denying access to those who served in the militia or state units, and proof of indigence or incapacity was no longer required (see Resch 1988, pp. 106-07; *Annals*, 15-1, 1/19/1822, p. 116). As Resch (1988, p. 107) contends, the committee “upheld a strict interpretation of the Constitution that would deny government the power to create a pension establishment.”

The Senate committee’s bill, then, underscored the dynamics of the political context. While Monroe and some members of Congress saw the proposed pension legislation as a public benefit during a time of large federal surplus, many individual members of Congress saw it as a source of particularistic benefits. Stated differently, members saw in the pension legislation the possibility of extending “goodies” to their constituents, at a time when politics was becoming more and more regionally based. As two-party competition had broken down at the national level after the War of 1812, members were increasingly attentive to local needs and looked for opportunities to develop a “personal” brand name so as to build strong electoral ties (Jenkins and Weidenmier 1999; see also White 1951; Dangerfield 1952; Nielson 1968). The House approach in dealing with the proposed pension bill was to logroll – everyone got a piece, which explains the extension of benefits to veterans who served in militias, state units, and naval units. These additions were necessary to obtain the support of members from the Mid-Atlantic and South, for

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<sup>8</sup> Neither the vote on recommittal nor the vote on final passage elicited a roll call.

example, regions which provided relatively few troops to the Continental army. The Senate committee's stricter eligibility requirements flew in the face of House members' needs. More to the point, the committee's initial unwillingness to "play ball" on broad pension legislation threatened to put the whole legislative enterprise at risk.

The underlying Senate membership would be pragmatic, however, seeing clearly the same particularistic elements in the pension bill that appealed to House members. The first example of this occurred on February 13, 1818, when a small group of strict constructionists, led by James Barbour (DR-Va.), Nathaniel Macon (DR-N.C.), and William Smith (DR-S.C.), moved to postpone the bill indefinitely (which was akin to killing it).<sup>9</sup> The motion failed by a vote of 3-30 (*Annals*, 15-1, 2/13/1818, p. 200), with only Barbour, Macon, and Smith voting in favor. Resch (1988, p. 113) notes that in defeating the postponement motion, "the Senate resoundingly rejected republican principles opposed to creating a pension establishment." The question now was: what would such a pension establishment look like?

The first proposed amendment to the Senate committee bill was made on February 16, 1818, by Rufus King (F-N.Y.), who proposed to recommit the bill to committee so that it could be rewritten to limit pension eligibility to *officers* only. King's proposal was viewed as elitist and drew little support, and he quickly withdrew it (*Annals*, 15-1, 2/16/1818, p. 205). The following day, John Crittendon (DR-Ky.) moved to amend the bill, so as to include individuals who served in the militia, but after some debate it failed on a voice vote (*Annals*, 15-1, 2/17/1818, p. 209).<sup>10</sup> This signaled that the Senate would not pursue the universalistic logroll favored by the House.

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<sup>9</sup> Resch (1988, p. 112) wonders if these individuals "would have as passionate had the Senate's bill, like the House's, included the militia."

<sup>10</sup> Only seven members supported Crittendon's amendment.

Tensions ratcheted up the next day, February 18, 1818, when Isham Talbot (DR-Ky.) moved to add a “means test” to the bill, specifically a two-tiered property requirement (one tier for soldiers, the other for officers), so as to prevent wealthy veterans from receiving a pension. As Resch (1988, p. 144) notes: “The intent of the amendment was to make it clear that the benefit was not earned but, rather, charity.” Like King’s earlier, Talbot’s amendment was viewed by many as an elitist measure; yet, it also played into class-based politics and drew some support from members concerned about the costs of the pension program. In the end, Talbot’s amendment failed on a 14-18 vote (*Annals*, 15-1, 2/18/1818, p. 211). The House then adjourned.

An analysis of the means-test vote appears in Table 1, the politics of which map very well into the ideological divisions of the time. The two D-NOMINATE dimensions are both significant, and together explain 87.5% of the individual vote choice. A simple party model explains only 75% while a regional model explains only 65.6%, by comparison. Adding party and region on top of ideology adds no additional explanatory leverage.

The pensions bill was picked up once again a week later, when Abner LaCock (DR-Penn.) moved an amendment to reduce the eligibility requirement from three years of service to two years of service. LaCock’s amendment passed on an 18-13 vote (*Annals*, 15-1, 2/25/1818, p. 220). Later that same day, Isham Talbot (DR-Ky.) moved an amendment to reduce the eligibility requirement from two years of service (LaCock’s earlier revision) to nine months of service. Talbot’s amendment passed on a 16-15 vote (*Annals*, 15-1, 2/25/1818, p. 221). With regard to these two votes, Resch (1988, p. 147) states: “Senators from sections and states expecting to gain the most from the program united to defeat opponents from the states which stood to gain little from the act.”

An analysis of these two votes appears in Tables 2 and 3. The data in Table 2, which are results from a logit regression, seem to contradict Resch's assertion. The vote to reduce the service requirement from three to two years seems to fit within the major ideological cleavage of the time, as represented by the first D-NOMINATE dimension. Adding regional variables to the basic NOMINATE model (not reported in the table) does not add to the explanatory power of the model. Also interesting are the results in the last two columns of Table 2. If we look simply at the states that were part of the nation during the Revolutionary War, we see first that the main ideological cleavage explains the vote well. But, moreover, when a variable is added to proxy for those most affected by the enactment of pension legislation – i.e., the ratio of veterans in the state, measured (bluntly) by the number of enlistments during the war divided by the total state population in 1820 – we find that (a) the model's fit improves, as we explain 94.7% of the individual vote choices, versus 79% with the basic ideological model and (b) the direction of causality is *negative*. That is, this latter result suggests that senators from states with *lower* veteran ratios were *more* likely to vote for the reduction in the service requirement. Thus, it appears that this vote was consistent with the era's general theme, espoused by President Monroe, of honoring the veterans and promoting national harmony.

This changed quickly, however, on the vote to reduce service requirements from two years to nine months. Here, Resch's claim is validated, in that sectional concerns predominated and, more notably, particularistic interests, won out. Results from a logit regression are reported in Table 3. We find, in fact, that ideological cleavages provide *no* leverage in explaining vote choice. When we add regional variables (dummies for Mid-Atlantic, South, and West), however, the model's fit improves dramatically – the proportional reduction in error (PRE) increases from 0.333 to 0.467 – as Mid-Atlantic and South are both negative (as expected, given their lower

return relative to New England) and statistically significant. When we, once again, look only at those states that were part of the nation during the Revolutionary War, we find that ideological cleavages do a poor job of explaining individual vote choices on the amendment. However, once the ratio of veterans by state is included as a covariate, the model's explanatory power increases substantially. And, like the regional dummies in the prior model, the veteran ratio is *positive*, suggesting that senators from states that stood more to gain from the further liberalization of service requirements were more likely to support the amendment.

The following day, February 26, 1818, the amended Senate bill was engrossed and read for a third time, passing on a 23-8 vote (*Annals*, 15-1, 2/26/1818, pp. 222-23). After the flurry of amending, in which the Senate eventually devolved into a group of particularistic “takers,” the ideological cleavages that governed the initial handling of the bill returned. As Table 4 indicates, a simple, two-dimensional NOMINATE model fits the data well, with 83.9% of individual vote choice correctly predicted. This is a substantial improvement over alternative models, such as those based solely on party or region. In the end, the eight “nay” voter were scattered across the nation – three Senators from the Mid-Atlantic (two from Penn. and one from N.J.), who presumably were unhappy about the militia's exclusion from pension eligibility; the three strict-constructionists from the South (Macon, Barbour, and Smith), who tried to kill the pension bill early on; and two Senators from the West (one from Ind. and one from Ohio), who presumably saw little that could be gained from their individual perspective.

On March 5, 1818, the House took up the amended Senate bill. The main issue at hand was whether to make an additional amendment, so as to allow those who served in the militia or state units to be eligible for pensions. Arguments were made on both sides; some emphasized the importance of recognizing contributions toward the war effort that extended beyond the army

and navy, while others made note of the Senate's debate and worried that such an amendment would lead to the entire bill going down to defeat. A vote was taken, and the amendment to extend coverage to the militia and state units failed, 60-93 (*Annals*, 15-1, 3/5/1818, p. 1109). The House then agreed to the Senate version on a voice vote.

An analysis of the vote on the failed House amendment appears in Table 5. The vote is explained well by the underlying ideological cleavages in the House, as measured by the first and second D-NOMINATE dimensions. Looking at the vote differently, we see that there was a distinct regional breakdown (column 2), as most House members from New England (the constant term) and the Mid-Atlantic states opposed the amendment, while most members from the South and West supported it. Put simply, members from regions that supplied the most troops to the war effort, and thus would benefit most (relatively speaking) from keeping the pension legislation narrowly drawn, opposed the amendment, while members from regions that would gain the most by broadening pension eligibility supported the amendment. However, when a model is estimated with both ideology and regional components, we find that there is no extra explanatory leverage gained from region (column 3). This suggests that the ideological makeup of the House was geographically determined, and that a simple ideological model best fits the underlying data.

Thus, the House and Senate having agreed on the various provision, President Monroe then proceeded to sign the compromise bill into law, on March 18, 1818 (*Annals*, 15-1, 3/18/1818, pp. 2518-19). Both before and after the House vote, there were discussions about generating supplemental legislation to extend the pensions benefits beyond the army and navy, but these were only lukewarm at best. In fact, when Rep. John Holmes (DR-Mass.) offered a bill along those lines later in the session (on April 9, 1818) and asked that it be referred to the

Military Affairs committee for consideration, the House rejected his request (*Annals*, 15-1, 4/9/1818, p. 1698). Support for an exclusionary pension bill was too strong.

Once in place, the pension law produced an effect that was far beyond what anyone had anticipated. Whereas advocates of the legislation assumed a modest number of veterans would come forth to collect their pension, in the range of 2,000 or so, they were overwhelmed by 20,000 requests in 1818, and other 10,000 the following year. The annual budget for pension provision was around \$155,000, while the actual costs of the program approached \$2,000,000 in the first year. Moreover, news of fraudulent claims being filed by the thousands as well as wealthy veterans receiving pensions spread quickly through the formal and informal grapevine (Resch 1988, p. 152; 1999, pp. 124-25). Adding to the nation's woes were two related conditions: (1) at the time the pension legislation was passed, the Congress decided to eliminate an internal revenue tax, and (2) tariff revenues, which had been flush in 1816-1817, slowed considerably, as an industrial and commercial depression took hold. In short order, the nation's budget surplus evaporated, and Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford had to secure loans in the millions of dollars to meet a myriad of national obligations (Glasson 1918, pp. 69-72). Concerns were also growing that the worst was still ahead – that the pension lists would continue to grow and the nation's obligations would extend for decades, threatening to cripple the American economy.

The 16th Congress convened in December 1819, and the House took the first action in dealing with the pension problem, by instructing the Committee on Revolutionary Pensions to investigate ways to deal with fraudulent practices, and if that proved too problematic, to consider the possibility of repealing the Act (*Annals*, 16-1, 12/15/1819, p. 734). Joseph Bloomfield, (DR-N.J.) chairman of the committee and the initial entrepreneur for the pension legislation in the

House during the previous Congress, reported back a resolution on January 4, 1820, stating: “That it is not expedient, nor will it comport with the honor and dignity of the American nation, to repeal” the Pension Act (*Annals*, 16-1, 1/4/1820, pp. 851-52). Bloomfield’s statement would effectively put the pension matter back on the congressional agenda, and opened the door for a new round of debate.<sup>11</sup>

Newton Cannon (DR-Tenn.) was the first to broach the subject, when on January 10, 1820, he moved that the Committee on Revolutionary Pensions investigate the possibility of equalizing payments to pensioners across rank; in effect, soldiers and officers would receive the same pensions, and presumably costs be cut by lowering officers’ pay accordingly. Cannon’s motion touched on notions of elitism and class conflicts in society, and significant debate was elicited (Resch 1998, p. 135-36). However, in the end, the motion failed by a slim margin, on a 70-74 voice vote (*Annals*, 16-1, 1/10/1820, p. 892). The pension issue was then shelved for a time, as the House would be embroiled in contested election cases and the politics of Missouri admission over the next two and a half months. Finally, on March 31, 1820, it was taken up again, and with great intensity. Many motions were made, either to equalize payments (as Cannon’s motion sought to do earlier), reduce generally pension payments (then, or at some point in the future), toughen service requirements, or firm up the “indigence” component of the initial Act. An “ins” versus “outs” cleavage emerged, as members from the Northeast and the Mid-Atlantic mostly faced off against members from the South and West. The former, the main beneficiaries of the Pension Act, fought against changes, while the latter, largely cut out of the benefits distributions, sought modifications (see *Annals*, 16-1, 3/31/1820, pp. 1703-09).

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<sup>11</sup> Bloomfield also reported a series of exchanges with Secretary of War John Calhoun on issues regarding fraudulent behavior in pension claims and the range of rules and stipulations that were being adopted to reduce said fraud. See *Annals*, 15-1, 1/4/1820, pp. 851-55.



The debate was contentious, and culminated in a motion by Cannon to repeal the entire Act. This was a significant overreach, however, and the motion was overwhelmingly defeated on a 32-122 vote (*Annals*, 16-1, 3/31/1820, p. 1709-10). As Resch (1999, p. 139) states: “By 1820, despite continued criticism of its principles and a nationwide pension scandal, the program remained politically and culturally entrenched and was now considered legally binding by its supporters. It has also become too large, too lucrative, and too popular, particularly in the Northeast, to kill.”

We examine this vote in Table 6. A basic ideological model explains the vote well (column 1), slightly better than a model based solely on region (column 2). The latter results indicate that Southern members were the most virulently opposed to the Pension Act, with Westerners only slightly against (the coefficient is negative, but not significant). When ideology and region are combined into a single model (column 3), ideology wins out; the results indicate that the ideological distribution of members was largely geographically based, as the NOMINATE measures (especially the second dimension score) soaks up most of the regional variation. Still, a combined model improves classification slightly, as the PRE increases from 0.063 (based on the ideological model alone) to 0.188. An alternative specification is to look at the “demand side” of the issue, by focusing on pensioners per capita.<sup>12</sup> If members are simply responding to external demand by seeking to maintain the distribution of particularistic benefits, this variable should in part explain the vote. And we find some evidence of this (column 4), as pensioners per capita is significant and in the expected direction.<sup>13</sup> The model's fit is modest, however, as the explanatory leverage offers no improvement over the naïve baseline. A final

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<sup>12</sup> See Jensen (2003, p. 112) for a data breakdown by state.

<sup>13</sup> This variable is operationalized in a crude fashion, as per capita here represents *state population*; thus all House members in a given state are associated with the same pension demand. This is clearly not correct, as some districts in a given no doubt had more pensioners than other districts; yet, coarseness aside, the model's results are intriguing.

model (column 5) combines ideology and pensioners per capita; the results indicate that ideology is the main determinant of the vote, and that pensioners per capita seems to map well into the ideological distribution of the House.

The failure of Cannon's motion did not mean that pension reform was dead, however. The costs of the pension program and the corruption that emerged around it resonated with many members, even those who wished to maintain most of its provisions. Eventually, the subject of a means test gained momentum, and seemed to be a compromise position that could achieve a majority. Thus, a "poverty line" would be determined by the War Department, and "indigence" would be the key criterion, in addition to service, to gain a pension. Potential pensioners would also have to place an itemized listing of their estates (and swear to its accuracy) before a Federal judge to continue drawing their pensions; this stipulation, it was hoped, would reduce the incidence of fraud.

Still, those members who were wedded to the high levels of particularistic benefits for their districts opposed any such changes. Rep. Benjamin Adams (F-Mass.) sought to derail the reform legislation by moving that consideration of the bill be postponed until the next Congress. His motion failed on a 63-93 vote (*Annals*, 16-1, 4/1/1820, pp. 1715-16). The reform measure – as embodied in the means test amendment – was then considered, and it passed on an 80-72 vote (*Annals*, 16-1, 4/1/1820, p. 1716).

The analysis of these two votes appears in Tables 7 and 8. There was a distinct regional component to both votes, as members of the South and West voted as a bloc against members from the Northeast and Mid Atlantic. Still, eighteen of the ninety members from the Northeast and Mid Atlantic realized a reform measure was needed, and broke regional ranks to support the passage of the means-test amendment. Looking more broadly at the results, members' general

ideological predispositions were a factor in their vote choices, and the number of pensioners per capita was also a meaningful predictor. That latter variable closely correlates with region.

Across all models, there is a significant improvement in fit (as measured by the PRE), relative to a naïve baseline.

Once passed in the House, the legislation was sent to the Senate for approval. The bill was debated on April 25, 1820, and a number of minor amendments were proposed, all of which were defeated (*Annals*, 16-1, 4/25/1820, pp. 638-40). The bill, as agreed to in the House, was then considered, and it passed on a 24-17 vote (*Annals*, 16-1, 4/25/1820, p. 640). The vote, which appears in Table 9, suggests that the main ideological cleavage (as measured by the first NOMINATE dimension) provides a good degree of explanatory leverage. The ideological distribution in the Senate was quite geographically based; an attempt to model the vote with regional variable led to the South being dropped, because it was perfectly explained. The number of pensioners per capita also does an excellent job predicting the vote. The best model fit (in terms of PRE) is produced by a joint model, where ideology and pensioners per capita are the covariates; but because of moderate correlation between the variables, none show up as individually significant.

The amendment had the effect of starting the pension process from scratch. The pension roll, which had swelled over the previous two years, was erased, and pension claimants had to begin the application process anew. Veterans had to show proof of both service and indigence, and this resulted in thousands of former-pensioners under the 1818 Act begin shut out under the new system. Anger and resentment spread throughout the nation, much of it directed at the War Department. Finally, thanks to an upsurge in tariff revenues (and a Treasury surplus) in 1822, a move was made to restore pension eligibility to many of those who had been denied under the

1820 pension revision. This resulted in the Act of 1823, which harkened back to the liberal administration of the pension rolls five years earlier. Veterans were once again actively courted, and encouraged to reapply and claim their rightful rewards. And thousands came forward to do just that. They would not be disappointed; as Resch (1999, p. 169) notes: “By the end of the decade nearly every applicant received a pension.”

In summary, the 1818 Pension Act was pathbreaking, in that it established the precedent of rewarding Revolutionary War veterans based on service, rather than invalidity, as had pension policies previously. There was still an indigence component built into the 1818 Act – made all the more relevant in the 1820 revision – but this would quickly become a relic of the past. For example, the 1823 revision was quite liberal in its application, allowing veterans back on the rolls if the value of their estates did not exceed \$300 (nearly \$170,000 in 2004 dollars, using nominal GDP per capita).<sup>14</sup> With a steady surplus in the Treasury, the Department became increasingly generous in defining indigence, and by December 1828, raised the personal property limitation for claimants to \$960 (Glasson 1918: 96-97).<sup>15</sup> The trend was clearly moving toward pension allocations based wholly on military service, and before long, this would be realized.

#### **IV. The Transition of the Pension System as a Political Issue, 1828 to 1832**

Passage of the Pension Act of 1818, and its various revisions over the next several years, by no means silenced the petitions of Revolutionary veterans. Because the legislation made explicit provision for only certain soldiers – those serving in militias and members of the Continental Army with less than 9 months’ service were excluded – and the rate of pension for

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<sup>14</sup> See Samuel H. Williamson, "What is the Relative Value?" Economic History Services, April 2004, URL : <http://www.eh.net/hmit/compare/>

<sup>15</sup> Shortly after assuming the presidency, Andrew Jackson rescinded this ruling on the basis that it was legislative in nature and therefore the Department had exceeded its authority (Message to Congress, December 8, 1829, H.doc.2/1, 21-1).

officers exceeded that of enlisted men (\$20 per month compared to \$8 per month), Congress faced continued calls for expansion. As Jensen (2003, p. 104) argues, of the groups clamoring for the beneficence of the nation, perhaps none felt the Republic guilty of the “sin of ingratitude” quite as much as the officers who had sold their commutation certificates.

Thus, President John Quincy Adams’ call for payment of the “debt of justice” owed to the longsuffering soldiers of the revolution did not fall upon deaf ears when presented to Congress in his annual message of 1827.<sup>16</sup> On May 15, 1828, a law was enacted to grant full pay for life to all the veterans previously encompassed under the two entitlements handed down by the Continental Congress: the surviving officers who had been promised half pay for life and the noncommissioned officers who had been awarded an \$80 lump sum payment.<sup>17</sup>

What is remarkable about this particular piece of legislation is *not* its scope. By the end of 1828, only about 850 pensioners had been placed on the rolls.<sup>18</sup> In 1836, the year in which authority for this program was transferred from the Secretary of the Treasury to the Secretary of War and the next year for which we were able to obtain relevant data, only about five percent of total pension payments were made under the provisions of this legislation.<sup>19</sup> It may be these characteristics that have relegated the act of 1828 to relative obscurity. Most treatments of federal pensions attach no more than passing mention to the legislation. However, the act marked a significant departure from past practice in that it did not require that the veteran be impoverished to qualify for placement on the rolls. In that sense, it set a major precedent for subsequent action. Additionally, in the years since 1818, pensions came to be wedded even more

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<sup>16</sup> Message to Congress, December 4, 1827, H.doc.2/1, 20-1.

<sup>17</sup> The bill was S. 44, “An Act for the relief of certain surviving officers and soldiers of the Army of the Revolution.” The companion House bill was H.R. 160.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, Richard Rush, to the Speaker of the House, January 12, 1829, H.doc.68, 20-2.

<sup>19</sup> Subsequent expansion of the pension system did not affect those who were included under the 1828 law. Rather, benefits were extended to others who were not encompassed by its provisions.

directly to sectional interests and the politics of the tariff. This was perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the rather acrimonious congressional debates of 1828.

In light of the emergence, if not the complete solidification, of military pensions as a particularistic issue falling along sectional lines during this period, it is worthwhile to delve more deeply into the consideration of the issue during the 20th Congress (1827-1829). Our primary aim is to highlight the degree to which the debate over pensions came to incorporate sectional animosity that was frequently tied to tariff policies. As Taussig (1923) and Forsythe (1977) maintain, the South in particular came to resent the tariffs of the 1820s and 30s. In the years leading up to and following enactment of the 1828 pension bill, southern legislators' discussions of federal pensions, within the broader context of increased government spending arising from tariff revenue, took on an increasingly caustic tone (Jensen 2003).

To what degree did sectional interests enter into the calculations of members of Congress who voted on the 1828 legislation? Unlike the 1818 congressional debate, in 1828, the Senate made the initial move, while the House spent much of the first session dealing with what would come to be known as the “Tariff of Abominations.” On Thursday, January 24, 1828, Levi Woodbury (J-N.H.) rose, as chair of the select committee appointed to consider the memorial of the surviving officers of the Army of the Revolution “praying for the benefit of the promise of half-pay or, for a reasonable equivalent,” to report a bill (S. 44) for the officers’ relief.<sup>20</sup> The select committee, which had been constituted on December 18, 1827, was comprised of Woodbury, William H. Harrison (A-Ohio), John M. Pherson Berrien (J-Ga.), Martin Van Buren (J-N.Y.), and Daniel Webster (A-Mass.).<sup>21</sup> Woodbury provided an exhaustive history of the commutation, and grounded his advocacy of the bill as a “debt” owed to the venerable men of

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<sup>20</sup> “J” denotes that a member was affiliated with the Jackson faction in Congress, while “A” indicates affiliation with the Adams faction (sometimes referred to as Adams Democrats).

<sup>21</sup> *Senate Journal*, 20-1, p. 47.

the revolution. He also couched his argument in the relative prosperity of the time (*Register of Debates*, 20-1, 1/25/1828, pp. 128, 133).

In short order, the debate turned to the longstanding, divisive distinction between officers and soldiers, regulars and militia, and the absence of provision for widows and orphans. As members continued to offer their opening remarks on the committee's bill, Albion K. Parris (J-Maine) asserted that unless benefits were added for soldiers (as opposed to just officers), he would not vote for the bill (*Register*, 20-1, 1/25/1828, p. 149). To that end, he moved that the bill be recommitted for the purpose of adding such an amendment, which led to a protracted discussion of the ills of delaying the bill and questions surrounding parliamentary procedure that extended to the following Monday. The issue was resolved when, after a parliamentary ruling by the Vice President and a lengthy discourse by Van Buren on the injustices suffered by the officers, Parris withdrew his motion with the understanding that the issue would be taken up later in an amendment (*Register*, 20-1, 1/28/1828, p. 182).

Debate continued through the week, with a number of senators offering their views of the legislation and whether or not they would support it in its current form. The bill as reported by the select committee left blank the amount to be distributed among the claimants, in part because of the difficulty in determining the exact number who were alive. As is so often the case with pension legislation, the estimates (in hindsight) were exceedingly low. William Smith (J-S.C.) made just such a case in remarks of Tuesday, January 29. As it happens, his predictions were much more on the mark than those of the committee (*Register*, 20-1, p. 187). The lone southern member of the committee, John Berrien of Georgia, rose in support of the bill, and argued that while there were others with valid claims, the Senate was not absolved from paying those presented before it in the bill. Berrien went on to say that "I thank God, Sir, this Government is

now solvent, and competent to the payment of all just claims upon its Treasury” (*Register*, 20-1, 1/30/1828, p. 211). Berrien was quickly rebuffed by fellow Georgian (and Jacksonian) Thomas W. Cobb, who foresaw the difficulty in determining which party would receive the credit for passage of the bill, given “the zeal and ability displayed by each” in its advocacy (*Register*, p. 215).

The week’s debate closed with additional floor speeches on the part of Van Buren, Woodbury, and others of the legislation’s advocates, while remarks by two southern members foreshadowed the eventual sectional dynamics that would be evidenced in the votes to come. Nathaniel Macon (J-N.C.) expressed his lack of zeal in favor of the question, and his disdain for the partisan history of the Revolution, which “don’t stoop to [include] the militia” (*Register*, 20-1, 2/1/1828, pp. 226, 228), while John Tyler (J-Va.) predicted with keen foresight the expansive tendency of pension legislation in claiming that the bill would be “the first fruit of a liberal policy...from which there is no escaping” (*Register*, p. 232).

After a fairly lengthy interlude, the Senate next returned to the “surviving officers” bill on Tuesday, March 11, 1828. Still unresolved was the issue of exactly how much to insert for the cost of the bill. By division vote, the sum of \$1,100,000 failed to obtain support (*Register* p. 428). This was followed by a series of recorded votes, with which we can begin to assess with greater precision the degree to which various forces—some sectional and particularistic, others more ideologically based—were at work in determining this issue. Our macro-level argument is that key aspects of the bill were decided upon particularistic grounds, with some sections of the country benefiting more than others (and thus offering more support for the bill).

The first recorded vote was on a motion to fill the blank with the sum of \$800,000, which went down to defeat 19-26 (*Register*, 20-1, 3/12/1828, p. 428). Our analysis of this vote, which



appears in Table 10, reveals that the politics surrounding it do not map well onto a basic model with conventional variables. Party (as indicated by affiliation with the Adams coalition), region, and the ratio of original enlistees to the 1830 population offer no improvement over a naïve model predicting all nay votes (the modal category). The only measures that contribute any explanatory power are the D-NOMINATE dimensions, the second of which is marginally significant. However, even in this case, the PRE is only about 0.2.

Perhaps sensing an opportunity to put the issue to rest, Cobb of Georgia immediately moved the indefinite postponement of the bill. The question was decided in the negative by a razor-thin margin, with 22 in favor and 23 opposed. In logit results not presented, none of the predictors demonstrated a statistically discernible effect on the vote.

Following on the heels of the postponement motion, Samuel Smith (J-Md.) moved to fill the blank with the amount of \$500,000, which also failed to obtain the requisite votes for adoption. At this point the bill was laid upon the table, and its future was very much in doubt, as the Senate was unable to resolve the most basic of questions. The bill's proponents were left to plot a course that would frame the bill in a manner palatable to a majority of the Senate.

To the surprise (and dismay) of some members, the measure was resurrected on Friday, April 25, 1828, when Mr. Woodbury moved that the bill be taken up, with a substitute version having replaced the earlier draft. The new language called for full pay for life, rather than a lump sum, to both officers and non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Continental line (*Register* 20-1, 4/25/1828, p. 696). Mr. Macon of North Carolina objected to the grants provided in the bill "at a time when the distresses of the People were [never] greater" (p. 699), while Cobb of Georgia railed against the skillful manipulations of the bill's managers (p. 700). Cobb went on to claim that the "extravagance" of the bill was due to the joining of forces between the friends of

the administration and their opponents who could ill afford being on the wrong side of a popular issue.<sup>22</sup>

Daniel Webster (A-Mass.) made a fervent plea for support of the legislation, in the process tracing the evolution of the bill from a lump sum to an annuity, which seemed to be the only solution that had the potential to attract majority support (p. 704). In lieu of the blank space for the amount to be distributed, which had proven unworkable in the debates of the preceding months, the substitute bill left open for debate the date on which the provision would be made effective. This issue was the first to be voted upon by the Senate. By a 29-19 count, the date of March 3, 1826 was inserted, making the bill retroactive in its application. Not coincidentally, the roll call elicited a significant regional division that would characterize the eventual vote on accepting the substitute and engrossment and third reading.<sup>23</sup> Because our analysis of these votes demonstrated consistency in the coalitions and in the statistical results, we have chosen to present only the last of the three roll calls here.

As shown in Table 11, the vote on engrossment and third reading of the Senate bill, which was agreed to 30-17, fell starkly along sectional lines. The second dimension of NOMINATE taps into the emerging regional basis of politics tied to the slavery during this period (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, p. 67). As such, it represents a North-South divide, and roughly approximates the degree to which the two sections had a vested interest in pension provision. A more precise measure of these effects can be seen in column 2, which indicates that

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<sup>22</sup> Smith of Maryland delineated what he sensed to be the strong constituency pressure on this bill. While he counted only 12 officers who would be covered under the bill's provisions in the state of Maryland, "were he to vote against this bill, he might be certain of never being returned to Congress again" (*Register* 20-1, 4/28/1828, pp. 710-11).

<sup>23</sup> In the intervening period, votes were also taken on whether to define qualified service as that of three years as opposed to service rendered until the end of the war, as well as proposals to reduce the benefit from full pay to half pay and to extend four years' pay to the legal representatives of deceased officers and soldiers (*Register* 20-1, 4/28-30/1828, pp. 712-14). Each vote evidenced sectional dynamics, which were picked up in either the second NOMINATE dimension, the regional indicators, or some mixture of the two.

members from southern states were significantly less likely to favor the program than those from New England (the baseline category). Not surprisingly, senators from Mid-Atlantic states were similarly prone to support the bill as their New England counterparts (as indicated by the insignificant coefficient). The coefficient on the western states, while negative, does not obtain significance in this estimate. As predicted by Georgia's Thomas Cobb, party exerted no distinguishable effect on the vote, as can be seen in column 3. Party attachment to the measure was, therefore, likely neutralized as an election issue. Finally, the full model improves upon the baseline as well as the others (as indicated by the PRE), and allows us to more precisely partition the effects of region. In that states coded as western at this time included both northern and southern areas, in all likelihood there would be a regional flavor within the coalition. After controlling for the second NOMINATE dimension, western states were significantly less likely to vote for the bill. The western senators scoring highest on the second dimension hailed from states such as Kentucky and Tennessee, both of which had a comparatively high concentration of veterans relative to Louisiana and Missouri, for example.

The House took up the issue for preliminary debate on Wednesday, May 7, 1828. Proponents of the legislation, such as John Sterigere (J-Penn.), noted from the outset that based on the discussion in Congress over this question in previous years, "there was not a member on the floor who did not understand this subject as well now as he would after a week's debate" and that no amount of "debate which would take place would change that determination." Sterigere went on to argue that he believed the House would accept any amendments and was desirous of moving the bill forward to a final vote (*Register*, 20-1, 5/7/1828, p. 2602).

The following Monday, May 12, the House resumed its consideration of the bill, this time using the Senate's measure as the legislative vehicle. John Culpeper (A-N.C.), one of the few

administration allies in the South, pressed the House to pass the bill in a timely fashion, being “persuaded that it could only pass in its present form, [and conjuring] all its friends to refuse every amendment, and to offer none” (*Register*, 20-1, 5/12/1828, p. 2651). This the House did, in short order. Despite the efforts of a handful of members to expand the legislation or delay its disposition via amendments, the close of the session loomed large and the Committee of the Whole rose and reported the bill without amendment at the close of the day’s session (p. 2660). The debate in the full House paralleled that of the Senate, with the bill’s supporters couching their advocacy as meeting a rightful claim upon the government at a time when the treasury was flush, and opponents (such as James Clark of Kentucky) challenging the veracity of the estimated number of pensioners who would be covered (p. 2661). Despite the disagreement, debate was very brief compared to the Senate, and was cut off with the successful ordering of the previous question.

Only three recorded votes were taken during the bill’s consideration, all of which occurred directly leading up to and including final passage. For the sake of brevity, and because the findings are substantively the same across each of the votes, we only present estimates for the roll call on final passage, which passed 115-58. As Table 12 indicates, when taken separately, members’ D-NOMINATE positions, region, and party all played a role in the voting decision. The findings with regard to party are noteworthy in that *every* New Englander and all but two members from Mid-Atlantic states voted in favor of the bill; as such, we collapsed the two categories to create a regional baseline that avoids the statistical “problem” of perfect prediction. When pooled in a single model (column 4), we see that the improvement in fit is not much greater than the model based simply on region. As such, it appears that in the case of the 1828 pension act, the particularistic concerns of MCs trumped partisan and ideological interests.

## V. The Pension Act of 1832

None of the actions occurring in the years following the act of 1818 matched the scale of the pension bill of 1832. While the legislation of 1828 encompassed a more expansive definition of entitlement, it left out significantly more of the “old soldiers” than it included. Thus, on the heels of his election victory and seeking to bolster his support among a growing, mass electorate, President Andrew Jackson proposed in his annual message to Congress in December 1828 a review of federal pensions with an eye toward their expansion to “every Revolutionary soldier who aided in establishing our liberties, and who is unable to maintain himself in comfort.” Jackson viewed the primary defect of the system to be its unequal application, in that it failed to embrace “within its provisions all those who were, during the last war, disabled from supporting themselves, by manual labor” (*Register*, 21-1, Appendix, p. 14). While the House moved quickly in the 21st Congress (1830) to extend the pension system beyond what even Jackson had proposed, the bill stalled in the Senate, which was faced with a rapidly closing session at the time the bill was finally scheduled floor consideration. A motion to postpone Senate consideration of the bill was passed on April 30, 1830, effectively killing the bill in that Congress.

So in his message of 1831, Jackson renewed his call to action on behalf of revolutionary soldiers (*Register*, 22-1, Appendix, p. 5). The eventual product, which was hammered out over a three-month period in the spring of 1832, shared certain features with the comparatively modest 1828 measure. The legislation produced by the 22nd Congress was, like its predecessor, a service-pension act and as such placed no limitations on qualification based on economic situation or disability. Most importantly, the act extended to surviving Revolutionary War veterans regardless of line (Continental, state, volunteer, militia, or navy) who served a total of two years (whether in one or more terms) full pay for life retroactive to March 4, 1831. Those

with service of between six months and two years would receive a prorated benefit (Glasson 1918, p. 82).

In contrast to the debate over the Pension Act of 1828, controversy erupted quickly in 1832 and centered primarily in the House. That chamber's consideration of the bill was scattered over a three month period following its initial floor consideration on Wednesday, February 29.<sup>24</sup> Initially, discussion centered on seemingly minor matters such as administrative interpretation of previous acts and the improvement to be had by a general bill of this sort in lieu of Congress' management of persistent private bills. By April 3, the fourth day spent on the bill, Thomas Bouldin (J-Va.) characterized what he perceived to be the sectional nature of the bill and its connection with the tariff (*Register*, 22-1, pp. 2372-74).<sup>25</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, as Glasson (1918, p. 80) observes, the pension and tariff bills were under consideration of Congress concurrently and were enacted within a week of each other. The wedding of tariff policy with the pension bill became a recurring theme. Warren Davis (N-S.C.) contended “that the measures before them, contrary to the avowed wishes and intentions of their advocates, bore upon their front the evidence that they were sectional in their operation, and that they would be, in their consequences, ruinous to one portion of the Union to the precise extent that they were beneficial to another” (*Register*, 22-1, p. 2388).

The lengthy debate finally drew to a close on Tuesday, May 1, when the House considered a handful of amendments typical of pension measures: to establish or eliminate means tests, to extend the benefits to those involved in other conflicts (primarily the “Indian wars” in the west), to pension widows and orphans, to alter the length of necessary service, etc.

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<sup>24</sup> *Register*, 22-1, Feb. 29, 1832, pp. 1918-43; March 28, pp. 2277-82; March 29, pp. 2287-2300; April 3, pp. 2359-74; April 4, pp. 2386-96; April 5, pp. 2428-35; April 9, pp. 2446-63; April 12, pp. 2490-2504; April 17, pp. 2553-56; May 1, pp. 2672-2679.

<sup>25</sup> The four parties represented in the 22nd Congress were Jackson (J), Anti-Jackson (AJ), Nullifier (N), and Anti-Masonic (AM).

(p. 2679). The amendments were disposed of in short order, and the House moved to cut off debate and usher the bill to a vote on final passage, which took place the following day. The measure passed overwhelming by a count of 126-48. While there were recorded votes on fourteen different matters, the coalitions were quite stable across nearly every vote, so our analysis will focus solely on passage of the bill.

The results are presented in Table 13, where we find that individual voting decisions are closely aligned with both dimensions of D-NOMINATE. This suggests that members views on the scope of government (the first dimension) as well as regional tendencies (the second dimension) played a role in this case. A simple model with party, while significant, performs more poorly than the naïve model in its predictive power, underscoring that the division on this question was not grounded in partisan differences.<sup>26</sup> Column three presents estimates from a model based on region. Here again, we employ a baseline that encompasses both the New England and Mid-Atlantic states because the latter perfectly predicts a vote in favor of the bill. The results underscore the stark regional basis of position taking on expansion of the pension system. When estimated in the context of the full model, region continues to exert an impact along with the regionally-based second dimension of NOMINATE. Given the degree to which the two types of measure map onto one another, it is quite clear just how intertwined the particularistic sectional interests of the day had come to characterize the primary faultlines of politics in this period.

The course of debate in the Senate followed much the same trajectory as that of the House, despite the upper chamber initiating its consideration of the bill more than a month

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<sup>26</sup> We were unable to obtain estimates for the two minor parties in this case because they perfectly predict the outcome, with Nullifiers unanimously opposed to the bill and Anti-Masonics unified in support. Only two of the 51 Anti-Jacksonians voted against passage.

later.<sup>27</sup> For a time, the Senate considered its version (S. 1) alongside the general appropriations bill, which left only limited opportunity for debate on the pension question until the latter was resolved. When the Senate took up the pension bill in earnest, which occurred after some lengthy remarks on the potential cost of the program and the sectional implications posed by the legislation, it considered a handful of amendments dealing with the usual suspects: adding a provision for widows, reducing the requisite term of service, modifying the effective date of the legislation, adding particular regional forces, etc. Compared to the House, which had recently completed work on its bill, the Senate moved rather quickly, and with significantly less debate, toward passage of S. 1, which occurred Friday, May 18. The final roll call was taken on ordering the third reading, and was decided by a vote of 26-19.

Table 14 presents the estimates resulting from a logit analysis of this particular roll call. As we observed for the House vote, the D-NOMINATE dimensions are a significant predictor of vote choice, as is party, when included in separate models. A regional model is no longer estimable in that South perfectly predicts a nay vote while New England perfectly predicts a vote in favor. Only one senator from a mid-Atlantic state voted against the bill. In light of this, we include a rough, *ex post facto* estimate of constituency interest in the bill as measured by the percentage of the state's population pensioned under the bill by 1834.<sup>28</sup> This, of course, presumes that a senator would have been capable of predicting the degree to which citizens of his state would be able to take advantage of the bill's provisions. As column 4 shows, this rough measure is useful in explaining senators positions on the roll call, and when included in a full model (column 4), allows us to predict the outcome with greater than 95% accuracy. What is also interesting is the fact that the first dimension of D-NOMINATE is only marginally

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<sup>27</sup> *Register*, 22-1, April 5, pp. 706-09; April 9, pp. 737-40; April 11, pp. 761-66; April 27, pp. 862-64; May 2, pp. 874-75; May 11-18, pp. 919-34.

<sup>28</sup> Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions, 1834, Table B.



significant, with the regionally-motivated second dimension and the pensioner population providing most of the explanatory leverage. If we drop the first dimension from the model, there is no change in the predicted votes.

Because the House bill was more generous than that of the Senate, and the two versions would have to be reconciled if the issue were to make it to the President's desk before the close of the session, the House managers lobbied for the members of the lower House to accept the Senate bill without amendment. Henry Hubbard (J-N.H.) admitted "little affection for the Senate's bill," and explained, "I do not complain at the course taken by the Senate; for good and wise reasons, as is to be presumed, they have sent us their bill as an independent measure, and up to this time have not seen fit to act on the bill which passed this House. Sir, I am nevertheless disposed to take their bill. I consider the question to be—will you take the Senate's bill, or will you take nothing?" (*Register*, 22-1, 5/24/1832, p. 3098). Hubbard and his allies were able to stave off a few amendments, one of which was offered by Lewis Williams (AJ-N.C.) to reduce the minimum service requirement from six months to three months and thus increase the generosity of the measure, before successfully cutting off debate. The bill was ordered to a third reading by more than a 2-1 margin, and was soon after passed and signed by the president.

## V. Conclusion

In the years following enactment of the Pension Act of 1832, the federal pension system and its administration were modified and expanded on a number of occasions. For instance, in 1836, Congress made provision widows of revolutionary soldiers, and this action was followed up by enactments favoring veterans of the War of 1812, the Indian wars, and the War with Mexico. In 1833, a distinct pension office headed by the newly established Commissioner of Pensions was created within the War Department. The Bureau of Pensions was transferred to the

Department of the Interior in 1849, and would grow to become one of the largest agencies of the federal government during the post-Civil War era.

It is this same Union Army (UA) pension system that has been tied directly to partisan politics arising out of sectional interests related to the tariff. As Skocpol (1992), Bensel (1984), and others maintain, the massive redistribution of federal revenue to Civil War veterans, which amounted to nearly forty percent of federal spending in the late 1890s, was accomplished and sustained in no small part through the alliance of tariff proponents and groups pressuring for increased UA pensions. As our analysis has shown, the groundwork for this significant chapter of American history was laid much earlier than has been previously recognized.

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**Table 1: Senate Vote to Add Means-Test Requirement, 1818**

D-Nom 1	9.67* (4.13)
D-Nom 2	14.46* (6.73)
Constant	0.03 (0.63)
N	32
Chi2	27.53***
% Corr Pred	87.5
PRE (baseline)	0.714
PRE (party)	0.5
PRE (region)	0.64

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 2/18/1818, p. 211. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2: Senate Vote to Reduce Service Requirement from Three to Two Years, 1818**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
D-Nom 1	-4.11*** (1.23)	-5.09** (1.70)	-4.26* (2.00)
D-Nom 2	-3.24 (3.09)	-4.14 (3.70)	-7.92* (3.46)
Eligible/Population			-109.40 (78.82)
Constant	0.46 (0.50)	0.23 (0.74)	2.83 (2.62)
N	31	19	19
Chi2	11.25**	11.05**	7.12 <sup>t</sup>
% Corr Pred	77.4	79.0	94.7
PRE (baseline)	0.462	0.556	0.889

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 2/25/1818, p. 220. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>t</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 3: Senate Vote to Reduce Service Requirement from Two Years to Six Months, 1818**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
D-Nom 1	1.31 (1.07)	1.28 (1.38)	0.43 (1.14)	-2.24 (1.64)
D-Nom 2	1.32 (2.10)	3.63 (3.12)	1.58 (3.04)	2.90 (3.66)
Mid-Atlantic		-2.75* (1.20)		
South		-0.41 (1.87)		
West		-3.29* (1.49)		
Eligible/Population				82.67** (32.12)
Constant	0.13 (0.38)	1.94 (1.23)	0.76 (0.68)	-1.50 (1.09)
N	31	31	19	19
Chi2	1.68	13.38*	0.58	6.74 <sup>t</sup>
% Corr Pred	67.7	74.2	52.6	68.4
PRE (baseline)	0.333	0.467	-0.286	0.143

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 2/25/1818, p. 221. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>t</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 4: Senate Vote on Engrossment and Third Reading of Amended Pensions Bill, 1818**

D-Nom 1	7.32* (3.37)
D-Nom 2	8.67* (4.40)
Constant	2.56* (1.01)
N	31
Chi2	19.02***
% Corr Pred	83.9
PRE (baseline)	0.375
PRE (party)	0.375
PRE (region)	0.375

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 2/26/1818, pp. 222-23. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



**Table 5: House Vote on Amendment to Broaden Pension Eligibility, 1818**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
D-Nom 1	-3.59*** (0.74)		-3.07*** (0.95)
D-Nom 2	-4.37*** (1.21)		-3.31** (1.21)
Mid-Atlantic		-0.71 (0.56)	-0.94 (0.62)
South		2.36*** (0.53)	0.26 (0.77)
West		1.49* (0.60)	0.11 (0.73)
Constant	-0.70*** (0.22)	-1.17** (0.38)	-0.47 (0.47)
N	153	153	153
Chi2	42.00***	39.00***	43.01***
% Corr Pred PRE (baseline)	80.4 0.5	77.8 0.433	80.4 0.5

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 15-1, 3/5/1818, p. 1109. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 6: House Vote to Repeal the Pension Act, 1820**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
D-Nom 1	-3.62*** (0.86)		-2.48** (1.21)		-3.33** (1.06)
D-Nom 2	-3.16* (1.36)		-2.60 (1.51)		-3.27* (1.34)
Mid-Atlantic		-0.49 (0.85)	-0.27 (0.86)		
South		2.41*** (0.68)	0.87 (0.91)		
West		0.92 (0.82)	0.29 (0.84)		
Pensioners/ Population				-560.06* (284.47)	-75.39 (204.61)
Constant	-1.82*** (0.26)	-2.37*** (0.61)	-2.02*** (0.58)	-0.50 (0.36)	-1.67*** (0.47)
N	154	154	154	154	154
Chi2	29.38***	27.07***	33.92***	3.88*	30.42***
% Corr Pred PRE (baseline)	80.5 0.063	79.9 0.031	83.1 0.188	79.2 0	80.5 0.063

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 16-1, 3/31/1820, p. 1709-10. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 7: House Vote to Postpone Consideration of the Means-Test Amendment, 1820**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
D-Nom 1	3.06*** (0.60)		1.45 (0.90)		1.89** (0.73)
D-Nom 2	1.12 (1.00)		1.81 (1.24)		2.28* (1.06)
Mid-Atlantic		-0.62 (0.44)	-0.86 (0.48)		
South		-3.02*** (0.63)	-2.11** (0.83)		
West		-1.86** (0.62)	-1.71* (0.70)		
Pensioners/ population				499.84*** (100.71)	377.47*** (117.15)
Constant	-0.58** (0.19)	0.69* (0.34)	0.46 (0.40)	-1.48*** (0.26)	-1.39*** (0.32)
N	159	159	159	159	159
Chi2	29.30***	27.78***	31.97***	24.63***	36.40***
% Corr Pred PRE (baseline)	71.7 0.286	69.8 0.238	69.8 0.238	68.6 0.206	71.1 0.270

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 16-1, 4/1/1820, pp. 1715-16. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 8: House Vote to Pass Means-Test Amendment, 1820**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
D-Nom 1	-3.92*** (0.65)		-2.25* (0.90)		-2.69*** (0.73)
D-Nom 2	-1.76 (1.02)		-2.55* (1.30)		-2.97** (1.10)
Mid-Atlantic		0.47 (0.48)	0.75 (0.54)		
South		3.38*** (0.65)	1.99* (0.83)		
West		2.23*** (0.65)	2.02** (0.77)		
Pensioners/ population				-613.47*** (132.17)	-407.24*** (126.01)
Constant	0.25 (0.20)	-1.13** (0.38)	-0.78 (0.45)	1.29*** (0.26)	1.08*** (0.32)
N	152	152	152	159	159
Chi2	46.46***	36.22***	44.11***	21.54***	47.39***
% Corr Pred PRE	73.0	76.3	75.7	73.7	75.7
(baseline)	0.431	0.5	0.486	0.444	0.486

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 16-1, 4/1/1820, pp. 1716. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 9: Senate Vote to Pass House Means-Test Amendment, 1820**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
D-Nom 1	-12.43*** (3.26)		-7.38 (5.38)
D-Nom 2	0.94 (2.93)		-3.13 (3.54)
Eligible/Population		-5106.8** (1679.7)	-4474.5 (2469.3)
Constant	0.98 (0.55)	5.18*** (1.57)	4.88* (2.20)
N	41	41	41
Chi2	16.98***	9.24**	7.76*
%CorrPred	90.2	90.2	95.1
PRE (baseline)	0.765	0.765	0.882

Source: *Annals of Congress*, 16-1, 4/25/1820, p. 640. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 10: Senate Vote to Fill the Blank with \$800,000, Senate 1828**

D-Nom 1	0.28 (0.79)
D-Nom 2	0.89 (0.49)
Constant	-0.52 (0.35)
N	45
Chi2	3.82
%CorrPred	66.7
PRE (baseline)	0.211
PRE (party)	0.0
PRE (region)	0.158
PRE (veterans)	0.105

Source: *Register of Debates*, 20-1, 3/12/1828, p. 428. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 11: Senate Vote on Engrossment and Third Reading of Bill  
for “Surviving Officers and Soldiers,” 1828**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
D-Nom 1	1.43 (0.89)			0.26 (2.05)
D-Nom 2	1.10* (0.45)			2.21** (0.85)
Mid-Atlantic		0.47 (1.33)		-1.16 (1.36)
South		-2.71** (1.03)		-3.36* (1.32)
West		-1.02 (0.96)		-3.39* (1.47)
Party (Adams)			1.01 (0.65)	-1.11 (1.54)
Constant	0.29 (0.35)	1.61* (0.78)	0.15 (0.40)	3.08** (1.02)
N	47	47	47	47
Chi2	8.95*	9.83*	2.39	17.37**
%CorrPred	72.3	76.6	63.8	76.6
PRE (baseline)	0.235	0.353	0.0	0.353

Source: *Register of Debates*, 20-1, 4/30/1828, p. 713. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 12: House Vote on Passage of 1828 Pension Act**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
D-Nom 1	2.40*** (0.73)			1.06 (1.24)
D-Nom 2	-2.10*** (0.38)			0.07 (0.71)
South		-4.73*** (0.79)		-4.23*** (1.11)
West		-4.59*** (0.80)		-4.83*** (1.13)
Party (Adams)			1.66*** (0.36)	1.01 (0.91)
Constant	0.88*** (0.19)	3.82*** (0.72)	-0.02 (0.22)	3.24*** (0.77)
N	173	173	173	173
Chi2	38.07***	38.01***	20.88***	38.85***
%CorrPred	80.9	85.0	67.1	85.6
PRE (baseline)	0.431	0.552	0.017	0.569

Source: *Register of Debates*, 20-1, 5/13/1828, p. 2670. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



**Table 13: House Vote on Passage of 1832 Pension Act**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
D-Nom 1	4.13*** (1.14)			1.76 (1.83)
D-Nom 2	-3.77*** (0.55)			-2.38*** (0.67)
South		-5.49*** (0.83)		-3.04** (1.02)
West		-2.73*** (0.81)		-1.43 (0.87)
Party (Jackson)			-2.01*** (0.47)	-1.50 (1.14)
Constant	1.97*** (0.41)	3.83*** (0.72)	2.38*** (0.43)	4.11*** (1.08)
N	174	174	174	174
Chi2	50.10***	51.08***	18.06***	56.23***
%CorrPred	92.0	89.7	72.4	92.0
PRE (baseline)	0.708	0.625	0.0	0.708

Source: *Register of Debates*, 22-1, 5/2/1832, pp. 2712-13. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 14: Senate Vote on Ordering the Third Reading of S. 1, the Pension Act of 1832**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
D-Nom 1	5.06** (1.82)			4.13 (2.51)
D-Nom 2	2.91*** (0.72)			4.78* (2.09)
Party (Jackson)		-2.13** (0.71)		-3.56 (4.30)
Veteran Population			903.54*** (276.70)	1873.42** (623.65)
Constant	-0.55 (0.53)	1.50** (0.56)	-1.59* (0.67)	-1.88 (3.17)
N	45	45	45	45
Chi2	16.94***	8.94**	10.66**	10.91*
%CorrPred	91.1	73.3	64.4	95.6
PRE (baseline)	0.789	0.368	0.158	0.895

Source: *Register of Debates*, 22-1, 5/18/1832, p. 933. Table entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$