

CONGRESS AND ITS MEMBERS

THIRD
EDITION

ROGER H. DAVIDSON
WALTER J. OLESZEK



Congress and Its Members

THIRD EDITION

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Preface

The U.S. Congress is an institution that mirrors its political surroundings and adapts and adjusts to events and trends. As our first edition went to press in 1981, the Reagan era had just begun. It was one of those rare moments—only the fourth in this century—when the undeniable momentum of presidential leadership, backed by popular support, swept aside roadblocks to effect far-reaching shifts in the political agenda, public debate, and national priorities.

By 1985, when the second edition appeared, the Reagan revolution had slowed perceptibly. The era of divided government was marked by sharp ideological cleavages in both domestic and foreign affairs. Hurt by the Iran-contra revelations and lacking fresh ideas, the Reagan administration loosened its hold on the political agenda. This political vacuum was soon filled by the Democrats, frustrated and impatient after six years of Reagan in the White House. Emboldened by their recapture of the Senate and continued domination of the House in the 100th Congress (1987-1989), the Democrats gathered their forces (with some bipartisan help) to pass an ambitious legislative program, override key presidential vetoes, redirect Central American policy, help frame U.S.-Soviet arms agreements, and reject a Supreme Court nominee, Robert H. Bork.

As Congress and the presidency enter the post-Reagan era, this third edition attempts to provide a new portrait of our fast-moving target. Congress, in certain crucial respects, is a very different institution than it was in 1981. Nearly half the members of the House and Senate have been elected to their present positions since then (this despite low electoral turnover that has critics worried). Most committee chairmen and virtually all party leaders assumed their posts after 1981. And while there have been few formal alterations in structures or procedures, Congress's legislative workload and its techniques for handling that workload are vastly different than they were just a few years ago.

Because of the continued urgency of fiscal issues, we added a new chapter on the budget and domestic policy making. Another new chapter, on

national security, consolidates our treatment of foreign policy and also discusses issues such as military “pork barreling” and the war powers. Structural shifts in the legislative workload are described—for example, the increased use of a few “mega-bills” and a large number of uncontroversial “commemorative” bills. Changes in leadership (particularly in the Speaker of the House) and impressive levels of party voting are analyzed, along with changes in the balance of power between authorizing and appropriating committees. George Bush’s early encounters with Congress are evaluated in detail.

Trends in Congress’s political environment also are highlighted. Intensified concern about congressional recruitment (especially for House seats) is reflected in an expanded discussion of the quality of challengers. We attempt to explain not only why incumbents are so formidable but also why serious challengers are in short supply. Our analysis of gerrymandering is more thorough in light of the Supreme Court’s noteworthy—though we think misguided—ruling in an Indiana case, *Davis et al. v. Bandemer et al.* (1986), which raised more questions than it answered.

Amid all these legal, political, and institutional changes, there are underlying constants in Congress’s character and behavior. Most important is the dual nature of Congress as a collection of career-maximizing politicians and an arena for shaping and refining national policy. In this edition we use the “two Congresses” theme even more extensively to explain the myriad details of congressional life as well as scholarly findings about legislators’ behavior. Colorful personalities and practical examples are presented to enliven the enduring topics essential for understanding Capitol Hill. We strive to describe recent facts and trends precisely and perceptively; more than that, we try to place these developments in the broader historical and conceptual contexts necessary for full comprehension. Moreover, in writing this edition we have kept in mind general readers seeking an introduction to the modern Congress as well as college or university students taking courses on the legislative process and national policy making.

As with most interpretive texts, this is a collaborative work. Professors Jerry Calvert of Montana State University, Linda L. Fowler of Syracuse University, and Jean Torcom of California State University, Sacramento, were kind enough to review the second edition of our book and to offer many thoughtful recommendations. To them, as well as to those who contributed to the first two editions, we offer heartfelt thanks. We also would like to thank our readers, including students and teachers at the more than 300 colleges and universities here and abroad where our book has been adopted.

Our colleagues and fellow scholars have provided encouragement and assistance at many specific junctures. Among them we acknowledge especially Joe Cantor, Royce Crocker, Edward M. Davis III, Paul Dwyer, Louis Fisher, David Huckabee, Robert Keith, Johnny Killian, Ronald Moe, Ilona Nickels, John Pontius, Sula P. Richardson, and Richard Sachs.

The staff at CQ Press deserves special thanks. Director Joanne Daniels has given us enthusiastic support. Our editor for this edition, Barbara de Boinville, is one of the best in the business; she has been unfailingly a tough yet cheerful critic. Kerry Kern, the production editor for this volume, juggled balky software and insistent authors with diplomatic aplomb. And for their valuable production help and photo research we thank Nancy Kervin and Jamie Holland.

Our deep appreciation for our families, their love and support, cannot be fully encompassed by words. As a measure of our affection, this edition is dedicated to them.

Roger H. Davidson
Walter J. Oleszek
Washington, D.C.
June 1989

Contents

Tables, Figures, and Boxes	xi
Preface	xiii
Part One: In Search of the Two Congresses	2
1 The Two Congresses	3
The Dual Nature of Congress	4
Divergent Views of Congress	8
2 Evolution of the Modern Congress	13
Antecedents of Congress	14
Congress in the Constitution	17
Institutional Evolution	24
Evolution of the Legislator's Job	33
Conclusion	38
Part Two: A Congress of Ambassadors	43
3 Going for It: Recruitment Roulette	47
Formal Rules of the Game	48
Districting in the House	51
Becoming a Candidate	57
The Money Factor	64
Nominating Politics	75
Summary	76

4	Making It: The Electoral Game	83
	Campaign Strategies	84
	Campaign Resources	86
	Campaign Techniques	92
	How Voters Decide	94
	Election Outcomes	106
5	Being There: Hill Styles and Home Styles	115
	Hill Styles	115
	Looking Homeward	127
	Office of the Member, Inc.	137
	Members and the Media	142
	Conclusion	148
	Part Three: A Deliberative Assembly of One Nation	155
6	Leaders and Parties in Congress	159
	Leaders of the House	160
	Leaders of the Senate	167
	Selection of Leaders	174
	Jobs of Leaders	176
	Party Caucuses, Committees, and Informal Groups	182
	Party Continuity and Change	184
	Conclusion	188
7	Committees: Workshops of Congress	195
	Evolution of the Committee System	196
	Types of Committees	198
	The Assignment Process	203
	Committee Leadership	210
	Policy Making in Committee	212
	Committee Staff	218
	Committee Reform	220
	Conclusion	221
8	Congress and the President	227
	The President as Legislator	228
	Sources of Legislative-Executive Cooperation	239
	Sources of Legislative-Executive Conflict	243
	Lobbying the Congress	245
	The Balance of Power	249
	Conclusion	250

9 Congress and the Bureaucracy	257
Congress Organizes the Executive Branch	258
Congressional Control of the Bureaucracy	267
Congress and the Courts	275
Conclusion	276
10 Congress and Organized Interests	281
A Nation of Joiners	281
Pressure Group Methods	282
Groups and the Electoral Connection	289
Groups and Legislative Politics	291
Informal Groups of Members	294
Regulation of Lobbying	299
Conclusion	301
 Part Four: Policy Making and Change in the Two Congresses	 305
<hr/>	
11 Congressional Rules and Procedures	307
Introduction of Bills	308
Referral of Bills	313
Scheduling in the House	314
House Floor Procedures	322
Scheduling in the Senate	326
Senate Floor Procedures	328
Resolving House-Senate Differences	330
Conclusion	332
12 Decision Making in Congress	337
The Power to Choose	337
Types of Decisions	338
Determinants of Voting	345
Giving and Taking Cues	352
Legislative Bargaining	354
13 Congress, Budgets, and Domestic Policy Making	365
Definitions of Policy	365
Stages of Policy Making	367
Types of Domestic Policies	370
Characteristics of Congressional Policy Making	374
Authorizations and Appropriations	377

The 1974 Budget Act	379	
Changes in the Budget Process	380	
Assessment and Implications	384	
Conclusion	388	
14 Congress and National Security Policies		393
Constitutional Powers	394	
Types of Foreign and National Security Policies	395	
Who Speaks for Congress?	405	
The Ebb and Flow of Power	410	
Conclusion	413	
15 The Two Congresses and the American People		417
Congress-as-Politicians	419	
Congress-as-Institution	422	
A Mirror of Ourselves	424	
Into the Third Century	425	
 Appendix		 431
Suggested Readings		435
Index		443

Tables, Figures, and Boxes

Tables

2-1	Growth in Size of House and Its Constituents, 1790-1990 Census	26
2-2	Measures Introduced and Enacted, Selected Congresses, 1789-1988	30
3-1	The Advantage of Incumbency in the House and Senate, 1946-1988	60
3-2	Average House and Senate Campaign Contributions, 1974-1986	65
4-1	Midterm Fortunes of Presidential Parties, 1934-1986	100
4-2	Voter Contact with House and Senate Candidates	103
4-3	How People Explained Their Vote in 1986 House Races	105
5-1	House Members' Views on the Jobs Expected of Them	122
5-2	Activities of Members of Congress: Actual and Ideal	126
5-3	Representational Roles of Eighty-Seven House Members	129
5-4	House and Senate Margins of Victory, 1970-1988	132
6-1	Party Committees in the Senate and House	183
7-1	Standing Committees of the House and Senate, 101st Congress	199
7-2	House-Senate Committee Comparison	205

xii *Tables, Figures, and Boxes*

8-1	The Policy-Making Context for Presidential Leadership, 1981, 1989	230
8-2	Sources of Ideas for the President's Domestic Agenda	233
8-3	Number of Presidential Vetoes, 1789-1989	235
8-4	The Roles of Congress and the President in Policy Making	251
9-1	Federal Civilian Work Force, 1977-1987	258
10-1	Membership in Various Groups, 1980, 1984, 1988	282
10-2	Lobbying Techniques Used by 174 Sampled Interest Groups	284
10-3	PAC Donations to House Candidates, 1987-1988	291
10-4	Informal Congressional Groups, 1988	296
11-1	Number and Length of Public Laws, 80th-99th Congresses (1947-1987)	313
11-2	Procedural Route to the House Floor, 98th-100th Congresses (1983-1989)	317
11-3	Open and Restrictive Rules, 95th-100th Congresses (1977-1989)	319
12-1	Typology of Bargaining	356
13-1	The Regulatory Future	373
13-2	Budget Timetable, 1989	381
14-1	Congressional Committees Dealing with International Affairs	408
A-1	Party Control of the Presidency, Senate, House, 1901-1991	432

Figures

2-1	Member and Committee Staffs, 1891-1986	28
2-2	Hours in Session, House of Representatives, Selected Congresses, 1955-1988	31
2-3	Turnover and Seniority in Congress, 1791-1988	36
3-1	Congressional Apportionment in 1980 and Projected Seat Changes after 1990 Census	50

3-2	Average Congressional Campaign Expenditures for Incumbents, Challengers, and Open-Seat Candidates, 1972-1986	67
3-3	Party Committees' Giving to Congressional Candidates, 1976-1988	71
4-1	Campaign Spending and Public Recognition of Candidates	89
4-2	Where Does the Campaign Dollar Go?	91
4-3	Turnout in Presidential and House Elections, 1932-1988	95
4-4	Political Party Identification of the Electorate, 1952-1988	97
4-5	Party-Line Voters, Defectors, and Independents in House Elections, 1956-1980	98
5-1	Occupations of House Members in Eleven Selected Congresses	117
5-2	Incoming and Outgoing Congressional Mail, 1972-1988	144
6-1	Organization of the House of Representatives, 101st Congress (1989-1991)	162
6-2	Organization of the Senate, 101st Congress (1989-1991)	168
8-1	Presidential Success on Votes, 1953-1988	242
9-1	Organization of the Federal Executive Branch	260
9-2	The Appointments Process	261
11-1	How a Bill Becomes a Law	309
11-2	Major Categories of Public Laws, 1977-1985	315
12-1	Party Unity Votes in Congress, 1970-1988	346
12-2	Levels of Party Voting in Congress, 1970-1988	348
12-3	Conservative Coalition Votes and Victories, 1970-1988	351
13-1	Composition of the Federal Budget, 1965 and 1990	384
14-1	Defense and Foreign Policy Spending as Percentage of Total Budget Outlays, 1940-1994	401
15-1	A Congressional "Fever Chart": The Ups and Downs of Congressional Popularity, 1963-1989	423

Boxes

Congressional Allowances, 1989	141
Party Assignment Committees	207
The Senate GOP Assignment Process	209
Markup Duel on Acid Rain	216
Pocket-Veto Controversy	236
Member-to-Member Lobbying	286
Types of Legislation	312
Example of a Rule from the Rules Committee	318
Examples of Creative Rules	320
Example of a Unanimous Consent Agreement	328
The War Powers Resolution in Action	406
Congressional Ethics.	421

PART ONE

In Search of the Two Congresses

A good government implies two things: first, fidelity to the object of government, which is the happiness of the people, secondly, a knowledge of the means by which that object can be best attained.

The Federalist, No. 62 (1788)

Legislatures are really two objects: a collectivity and an institution. As a collectivity, individual representatives act as receptors, reflecting the needs and wants of constituents. As an institution, the Legislature has to make laws, arriving at some conclusions about what ought to be done about public problems.

Charles O. Jones

*“From the Suffrage of the People: An Essay of
Support and Worry for Legislatures” (1974)*

These two statements—one by the authors of *The Federalist*, the other by a modern scholar—express our thesis. As the words suggest, the idea that representative assemblies contain an inherent tension between representation and lawmaking, between individual and institution, is neither new nor novel. This dualism is embedded in the Constitution, manifested in history, and validated by scholars’ findings.

In elaborating the “two Congresses” notion, this book is organized into four parts, each with a brief explanatory introduction. In this part the two Congresses theme is outlined, and the historical development of the institution and its members is briefly traced.



Two at a time, flags are raised and lowered on a special flagpole for constituents requesting a “flag flown over the Capitol.”

CHAPTER ONE

The Two Congresses

In California's 19th Congressional District a battle royal was raging. It was a rarity in congressional politics: a close-fought election contest between an eight-term U.S. representative and a well-financed challenger, a veteran state legislator.

Just beyond the northern outposts of metropolitan Los Angeles, the 19th district runs North and South from Santa Barbara along the Pacific Ocean. Despite its idyllic beaches, neat Spanish-style homes, and orchards of lemons and avocados, the 19th is a battleground in more ways than one. Issues of growth and the environment generate intense political pressures and divide the citizenry. At the northern and southern edges of the district, including the working-class cities of Santa Maria and Ventura, industry and growth are welcomed. But in Santa Barbara, where 60 percent of the voters reside and where costly homes overlook a phalanx of offshore oil platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel, environmental protection issues rally support.

The home of Ronald Reagan's mountain-top Rancho Cielo, the district has voted Republican in recent national elections. But the 19th "has enough Democrats to keep it from being a safely Republican district," and it has sent Democrats to the state legislature in Sacramento.¹ One of these was state senator Gary K. Hart (no relation of the one-time Colorado senator and presidential contender). Growing impatient, Hart at last decided to challenge veteran representative Robert J. Lagomarsino in 1988. Lagomarsino had built his congressional career, begun in 1974, out of a deft combination of attentive constituent service and a reputation for being something of an environmentalist on the House Interior Committee. Overall, his voting record was quite conservative, and his main enthusiasm on Capitol Hill seemed to be unflagging loyalty to the cause of the Nicaraguan contras as a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Hart's well-financed campaign tried to convince the district that the incumbent was a right-winger out of step with the area's moderate voters. He charged that Lagomarsino had lagged in protecting the Santa Barbara Channel from oil exploitation and that Lagomarsino's frequent forays to