



THINKING ABOUT CONGRESS

ESSAYS ON CONGRESSIONAL CHANGE
LAWRENCE C. DODD

FOREWORD BY ERIC SCHICKLER

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Change

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THINKING ABOUT CONGRESS

Observing the polarized, debilitating politics of today's Congress, one wonders whether change is possible on Capitol Hill. In *Thinking about Congress*, Lawrence Dodd reminds us that Congress seemed equally intransigent at times in the past, yet change and rejuvenation came. Reading his classic essays, one sees Congress move from Committee Government in the mid-twentieth century to Liberal Democratic reforms in the 1970s to the 1994 Republican Revolution to Party Government today. Simultaneously, one proceeds with Dodd to an ever-deeper understanding of the dynamic character of Congress.

Across forty years of watching paralysis give way to change, Dodd crafts a theory of congressional cycles – essay by essay – that explains why Congress evolves. However permanent periods of intransigency appear, the theory argues, they can and do give way to growing concern by legislators and parties for the collective public interest; to citizen demand for change generated by social crises; and to innovative ideas about politics and policy. With these developments come policy breakthrough, institutional renewal, and enormous social progress.

A rare book, *Thinking about Congress* holds out hope for the future while illuminating both the process and object of inquiry.

Lawrence C. Dodd holds the Manning J. Dauer Eminent Scholar Chair in Political Science at the University of Florida. His books include *Coalitions in Parliamentary Government*, *Congress and the Administrative State*, *Learning Democracy*, and nine editions of *Congress Reconsidered*. The university selected him as 2007 Teacher/Scholar of the Year, its highest faculty honor.

For Meredith, Christopher and Leslie

FOREWORD

Eric Schickler

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This volume brings together many of the important contributions by Larry Dodd to the study of Congress over the past thirty-five years. Although Dodd's understanding of Congress has evolved over this period—along with the institution itself—a central innovative move is evident in the earliest work, which runs through each of the individual contributions and has made a singular contribution to the development of the Congress field. Dodd showed scholars how to combine historical and rational choice approaches to the study of Congress, demonstrating that the combination of multiple theoretical lenses can lead to a richer understanding of the legislative branch.

The dominant approach to the study of Congress in the 1960s had been behavioral and norm-oriented, focusing on how Congress works as a social system. Starting in the mid-1970s, David Mayhew, Richard Fenno, and Morris Fiorina transformed the field by shifting the focus to individual, goal-oriented action. They asked: what kind of institutions and policies would rational members of Congress design to suit their particular interests? This question then became the dominant orientation in the field, generating considerable theoretical and empirical traction. But just as the “sociological” work of the 1960s tended to treat Congress as a relatively static system, the rational choice scholarship of the 1970s to 1990s generally treated Congress as an “equilibrium” institution. Congress was well-designed to achieve members' interests. In the absence of a major exogenous shock, stability was to be expected. As a result, this work shared with the sociological tradition a general lack of attention to historical development.¹

1 There were, of course, exceptions. Polsby's studies of institutionalization and the seniority system were historical works in the sociological tradition, and there were a handful of rational-choice-oriented scholars who incorporated historical perspectives (e.g. Brady on realignment; Cooper and Brady 1981).

In “Congress and the Quest for Power” (1977), Dodd adopts the individualistic, goal-oriented approach that was just emerging from rational choice work on Congress, but unlike most other scholars working at the time, he connects this goal-oriented framework to a historical, developmental approach. Dodd takes as a given that members seek to design Congress in ways that promote the realization of their individual goals. But he argues that these goals do not generate a single stable solution. Dodd begins with the assumption that members of Congress seek individual power. The most obvious way to gain individual power is to decentralize: give power to committees and subcommittees, and then spread influence within those units to many backbenchers. The problem, Dodd notes, is that this fragmentation weakens Congress as an institution over the long term, inviting executive aggrandizement. As Congress loses power to the White House, the value of the many individual power bases within the institution erodes. What good is it to be a subcommittee chair if agenda-setting and policy-formation drift from Congress’s committee system to the executive branch? This erosion gives power-seeking members of Congress an incentive to recentralize, empowering the leadership. The result is a cyclical dynamic, in which Congress oscillates between bouts of fragmentation and centralizing reform. Dodd notes, however, that even as members centralize, they are loath to give up too much influence to the leadership, and thus often build in decentralizing features even as they attempt to foster greater coordination. The budget process that emerged with the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 is a signal example.

As the successive chapters make clear, Dodd has refined this view over the years. Rather than simply an internally-driven cycle, he has come to emphasize the interplay of internal and external forces. He has also placed greater emphasis on political learning and experimentation as keys to the reform process. Yet the core insights from the 1977 article endure and continued to animate Dodd’s subsequent contributions.

One sees the impact of Dodd’s framework in the burgeoning literature on “Congress and History” since the 1990s. Dodd demonstrated that considerable leverage can be gained by integrating a focus on individual goals with a historical perspective. The result is to enhance both rational choice and historical scholarship. Dodd pushed scholars to see that individual “rational” action need not generate a stable equilibrium institution that is satisfying to most members. Instead, the result may well be a messy institution that combines elements of centralization and fragmentation, and that fails to gain the trust of the American public or to satisfy members’ goal of exercising effective influence. It is through the study of historical development that one can identify the forces generating these conflicting reforms. Yet the historical scholarship is not simply motivated by the goal of understanding each particular episode, but rather it is in the service of gaining a broader theoretical understanding of how Congress works (or fails to work) and how the institution fits into our broader political system.

When I started working on my dissertation in the mid-1990s, I gravitated to

Dodd's "Quest for Power" and his later work because it provided a lesson in how one can address big questions about institutional development while attending to the importance of individual goal-oriented action. Since then, I have appreciated the influence of Dodd's works as it permeated the scholarship of many of my fellow Congress scholars. The idea of bringing multiple theoretical lenses together in a disciplined manner was a key innovation when Dodd joined historical and rational choice approaches in the 1970s. Today, it is part of the established repertoire of Congress scholars, itself a testament to Dodd's impact on the field. At the same time, the vitality of Dodd's more recent contributions suggests that linking history and rational choice is not so much the "answer" as a tool for continued exploration and refinement of our understanding of Congress.

PREFACE

The Origin, Development and Plan of the Book

The enclosed essays chart the evolution of Congress and my understanding of it across four decades of remarkable change. When I entered graduate school in the late 1960s, the Textbook Congress was in full sway on Capitol Hill. The literature on Congress assured my colleagues and me that the world of committee government, weak political parties, the conservative coalition, domineering committee chairs, subsystem politics, a disorganized and uncoordinated policy process—all of this was here to stay, enshrined by the very nature of the constitutional system, the organizational necessities of institutional governance, the office-seeking goals of members, and the segmented policy concerns of citizens. The Democratic Party appeared to have a permanent lock on control of Congress, combining its historic support from the Solid South with growing loyalty from northern constituencies supportive of the party's social programs.

Amid the factionalized nature of party politics and the fragmented nature of committee power, effective policy activism in Congress appeared dependent on strong presidential leadership and united party government. Reliant on strong presidents and preoccupied by local politics and personal reelection, members of Congress were hesitant to challenge the authority of presidents, even during an unpopular war.

Contemporary analysts were so frustrated with Congress that they proposed the nation consider a move to formal reliance on presidential policy making, with Congress left to conduct oversight of the executive and ratify presidential policy initiatives (Huntington, 1965; Burns, 1963, 1965). The creation of a congressional budget process and formal budget committees, the enactment of a war powers act, limitations of the norm of seniority in the selection of committee chairs, the weakening of the power of committee chairs, the strengthening of subcommittee autonomy, the reactivation of congressional party caucuses, the

empowerment of party leaders to dominate the selection of committee members and committee chairs—none of these reforms appeared remotely possible within the dominant perspectives of the day.

Yet change and reform came and did so on a massive scale.

Within a decade all of the impossible reforms were enacted (Dodd and Schott, 1979; Sundquist, 1981). The congressional elections of 1974 in particular yielded a reformist surge on Capitol Hill that pushed forward the weakening of committee power and the strengthening of party leadership. Within twelve years Democratic dominance of the Senate would collapse, in the wake of the Reagan Revolution of 1981, preparing the way for Newt Gingrich and the Republican Revolution of 1994. Within roughly a quarter century a transition to party government in Congress would be so far advanced in nature and appear so inherent to American politics that analysts in the mid-1990s would come to doubt whether committee government had actually existed on the Hill, so difficult was it for those coming of age in the era of polarized partisanship to imagine a world of genteel bipartisan cooperation and committee government.

For those of my generation, coming of age as young political scientists amid the reform upheavals, the challenge came in understanding how and explaining why the politics of the Textbook Congress had collapsed, so inherent had it seemed in the very essence of American politics during our doctoral studies, and determining the character, consequences and implications of the new order on Capitol Hill. The essays in this volume emerged from my effort to respond to this challenge.

I. The Origin of the Book

As with my fellow political scientists, I was caught off guard by the upheavals in Congress. In truth, I had become disillusioned by Congress and American politics in the late 1960s. Though I had entered graduate school with the express intent of studying Congress and the presidency, the Vietnam War, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, the riots and societal disarray, the unwilling of Congress to push for an end to the War—all led me to wonder whether other approaches to democratic governance might be preferable to our own. In addition, while I had sat in on an undergraduate course on Congress taught by my early graduate mentor John C. Pierce during an introductory year of graduate studies at Tulane University, there were no courses on Congress or congressional-executive relations during my three years at the University of Minnesota, starting in the fall of 1969. And so I concentrated my studies on comparative politics and political theory, treating the United States as one of my area studies and focusing in-depth on European and British Commonwealth politics.

A dissertation on coalition politics in parliamentary democracies dissuaded me of the prospect that a magic solution existed elsewhere to the rigors of democratic life. A teaching position at the University of Texas-Austin in the fall of 1972

allowed me to return home to my beloved Southwest if only I would teach Congress. A Congressional Fellowship in 1974 offered an opportunity to move my young family to Washington and learn something up close and personal about the topic I was teaching. And so in the months following the Watergate election of 1974 I found myself on Capitol Hill and working in the House Democratic Whip Office as their resident Congressional Fellow.

It is difficult to convey today the awe, disorientation and excitement I experienced in December of 1974 and January of 1975 as I witnessed first hand the greatest congressional insurgency since the revolt against Speaker Joseph Cannon in 1910 and one of the most consequential restructurings of congressional power in American history. Everything that I had read about Congress and now was teaching my students seemed to collapse before my eyes. An institution that was said to be impervious to rapid change and innovation, with committee intransigence, gradualist tinkering and bipartisan conservative dominance the name of the game, appeared to be moving rapidly toward assertive partisanship, organizational and procedural transformation, and liberal dominance of congressional governance. Watching the response of the established committee and party leaders who flowed through the whip office in the early months of the new Congress, it was clear that the upheavals were real, with anxiety and uncertainty about their hold on power ever present on their faces.

Imbued by the excitement of the times, and inspired by research on the history of Congress by Joseph Cooper and David Brady (Cooper and Brady, 1973), I began scouring the Library of Congress and reading avidly on congressional history, trying to understand contemporary developments by putting them in a broader historical perspective (Dodd, 1980, 1987). Simultaneously, I focused substantial research attention on the whip system itself, witnessing and documenting a party leadership that was already more activist in vote-gathering by the early 1970s than scholars had previously realized (Dodd, 1979, 1983). And when I changed assignments as a Congressional Fellow in April of 1975, I switched to the Congressional Office of Bob Eckhardt of Texas, a Southern Democratic liberal deeply active in the reform-oriented House Democratic Study Group, which allowed me access to DSG meetings.

Additionally, I talked often with the other Congressional Fellows in my class, including John Ellwood, Bob Filner (now a member of the House), Michael Lyons, Bruce Oppenheimer, Cathy Rudder and Marcia Whicker Taylor, and also with recent Fellows still in Washington, particularly Norm Ornstein and James Thurber, getting their collective take on the events of the time. These discussions deepened my grasp of the extensive changes underway on the Hill and led to the decision by Bruce and me to prepare an edited volume on the ways in which the reforms were changing Congress. That decision produced the first edition of *Congress Reconsidered* (Dodd and Oppenheimer, eds., 1977), an edited volume of original scholarly essays that has traced the evolution of the reform and post-reform Congress across almost forty years and nine editions, with the tenth now

in the works. Perhaps most critically, I began to reflect seriously on the failure of the existing verities about Congress and American politics to foresee the reform upheavals or to provide retrospective explanation of their occurrence.

A devotee of the behavioral revolution in political science, I was imbued with the belief that systematic study of and theorizing about the observed behavior of individuals, groups and institutions would enable scholars to uncover regularities in politics, thereby foreseeing and understanding critical shifts in social and political relations (Eulau, 1967; Kaplan, 1964). I thus found the failure of political science to anticipate the upheavals in Congress deeply troubling. If we as a discipline could fail so miserably in foreseeing such dramatic and broad-ranging changes, of what use were our empirical studies, theoretical perspectives, analytical models, philosophical musings, normative critiques and reformist debates? What authentic grounding did we actually have in a reliable and dynamic understanding of political reality? If our theories and studies of Congress not only missed the boat, but actually proposed that the developments occurring on Capitol Hill were essentially impossible in their breadth and depth, perhaps political science could not deliver on the promises made by our behavioral fathers. Perhaps I should just do political history, or engage in contemporary political commentary, or continue with my study of coalition politics in parliamentary democracies, or return to Austin and enter politics. At this point my experience studying European and British Commonwealth parliaments provided an instructive perspective, cautioning restraint in my rush to judgment.

My investigation of coalitional politics in twenty parliamentary democracies had convinced me that the behavioralists' goal of a science of democratic politics held out true promise. Guided by the work of such scholars as Anthony Downs, William H. Riker, Harry Eckstein, Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, I had constructed and tested a theory of coalitional politics that appeared to uncover significant regularities in coalition dynamics across eighty years of parliamentary politics (Dodd, 1976a), accounting for general patterns of coalition politics and for change in those patterns between the pre-war and postwar eras. Simultaneously others—Robert Axelrod, Robert Dahl, Hugh Heclo, Ron Inglehart, Arend Lijphart, Robert Putnam to name only a few—were investigating additional dimensions of parliamentary politics, to great effect, so that a broad theory of parliamentary democracy seemed imminent, a promise that has for the most part been realized (Almond, Powell, Dalton, and Strom, 2009; Loewenberg, 2011).

The success of parliamentary scholars in generating simple and yet empirically compelling analyses of electoral and institutional politics was inspiring, holding out hope that a science of democracy might yet be possible, but it also served to put the challenge confronting students of American politics in perspective. Virtually all well-established democratic regimes were parliamentary in character, so that there were numerous experiences to compare and contrast in creating a theory of parliamentary democracy. And in truth the basic logic of parliamentary politics was relatively straightforward, at least by comparison with politics in the United

States. The central task of the parliament was to choose and oversee the Prime Minister and Cabinet government, with most parliamentary democracies leaving policy crafting largely if not entirely in the hands of the executive. As a result, national politics revolved around the selection and durability of governing parties or coalitions in ways captured well by Downs' goal-centered theory of party politics and electoral democracy in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957).

In contrast to parliamentary politics, the American constitutional system of separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, and a bicameral policy-making legislature was unique among major established industrial-era democracies and quite complex in its operation, much more complex than grasped by Downs in his treatment of American politics. Moreover, the United States was the most powerful nation-state democracy in the world, with its responsibility for the security of the West in the face of Cold War animosities adding greatly to the stresses of its politics.

On reflection, the problem confronting students of American politics appeared to lie not with the behavioral vision of our discipline but with the unique challenges posed by studying such a complex and one-of-a-kind political system. If this were so, the critical challenge facing devotees of the behavioral persuasion lay in constructing a theoretical vision, a way of thinking about this most powerful and distinctive democracy that could uncover a simple and dynamic order amid the vast complexities of its politics. Moreover, a key to such an enterprise, perhaps *the* key to it, could lie in addressing the issue at hand: charting and explaining the extensive, unforeseen patterns of change in congressional politics evident during the early to mid-1970s.

With this epiphany, and nudged by the questions and insights of my undergraduate and graduate students as I returned to teaching in the summer and fall of 1975, I set out on the journey charted in the essays in this book—the effort to fashion a dynamic yet parsimonious perspective on Congress that could account for the upheavals of the 1970s, make sense out of previous periods of institutional change, and provide prospective foresight on the direction of Congress and American politics into the future. In this endeavor I joined the many other scholars of my generation fascinated by the politics of Congress and concerned to understand why the reforms had occurred and what their implications and effects were. That generation, composed of those political scientists who began publishing on Congress during and immediately following the reforms of the 1970–1975 period, included Abramowitz, Aldrich, Arnold, Asher, Bond, Brady, Carmines, Cover, Deering, Ellwood, Erikson, Ferejohn, Fiorina, Fisher, Fowler, Hershey, Jacobson, Kernell, Kostroski, Loomis, Malbin, Mann, Nelson, Oppenheimer, Ornstein, Parker, Peters, Price, Rohde, Rudder, Shepsle, Sinclair, Smith, Stimson, Thurber, Uslander, Weingast, Weisberg, Wright, and many others. Focusing their attention like a laser beam on the reform and immediate post-reform period, they produced the most in-depth analysis of reformist upheaval and immediate post-reform politics that exists in the annals of legislative studies, with their work

providing me a deep grounding in empirical reality as I pushed forward on my effort to construct a theory of institutional reform and change.

I then benefitted as well from the generations of scholars coming into congressional studies in the 1980s and thereafter, a vast group that includes among its many fine scholars such gifted analysts as Adler, Alford, Ansolabehere, Arnold, Baker, Baumgartner, Bensel, Berkman, Bianco, Bickers, Binder, Bosso, Brunell, Burden, Cain, Cameron, Canon, Carson, Clinton, Collie, Cox, Currinder, DeGregorio, Dion, Evans, Farrier, Flower, Frisch, Gamm, Griffin, Hall, Hansen, Herrnson, Heitschusen, Hibbing, Howell, Humes, Jenkins, Jones, Kahn, Kelly, King, Koger, Krehbiel, Kriner, Krutz, Lawrence, Lee, Lewis, Lipinski, Maltzman, Mayer, McCarty, McCubbins, McKee, Morris, Nokkan, Oldmixon, Owens, Pearson, Peterson, Poole, Powell, Quirk, Roberts, Raven, Rosenthal, Rybicki, Sala, Sanders, Schiller, Schickler, Schraufnagel, Sellars, Stewart, Stein, Stone, Strahan, Sulkin, Swain, Swift, Tate, Theriault, Volden, Von Houweling, Wawro, Wilkerson and Young. These scholars and numerous others have provided my reform-era colleagues and me a deeper awareness of the historical and developmental forces operating on and within Congress, a clearer sense of the party dynamics engulfing the contemporary Congress, more detailed understanding of the cyclical tensions and processes at work in Congress, and a greater appreciation of the policy dynamics driving congressional politics.

And all of us, including those of the reform generation of scholars and those who followed, owe a huge debt to the extraordinary generation of early postwar scholars who played such a critical role in etching out the details of the Textbook Congress. These scholars, including Burns, Clauson, Cooper, Davidson, Dexter, Eulau, Fenno, Froman, Hammond, Hinckley, Huitt, Jones, Key, Kingdon, Lowi, Maass, Manley, Matthews, Mayhew, Ogul, Oleszek, Patterson, Peabody, Polsby, Price, Rieselbach, Ripley, Sundquist, Truman, Turner, Wildavsky, Wolfinger, Young, and others, provided an invaluable portrait of the committee government and bipartisan politics that dominated the early postwar period, with several of its members also linking this politics to the historical development of Congress. Without their detailed portrait of the postwar Congress, it would have been impossible for my generation to grasp so readily the dramatic nature of the changes occurring on Capitol Hill in the 1970s.

Finally, as detailed elsewhere (Dodd, 2001b), my work on Congress and change would have been impossible, at least in the form that it took, without the era-defining book, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, by David Mayhew (1974b). Coming of age in political science just as the Textbook Congress was about to give way to the new Reformed Congress, David drew on his immersion in the literature on the Textbook era and his experience on Capitol Hill as a Congressional Fellow in the late 1960s to craft a broad, speculative theory of Congress. Building on Downs' *Economic Theory of Democracy* and Richard Fenno's (1973) study of legislators' goal-oriented behavior in congressional committees, *Congressmen in Committees*, Mayhew proposed that scholars could best explain the overall

character of congressional politics by focusing on members' obsession with reelection. In seeing congressmen as 'single-minded seekers of reelection,' we then could explain the strategic and self-serving character of legislators' behavior, the apparent weakness of political parties, the decentralized and committee-oriented structure of congressional organization, the distributional nature of congressional policy making, the institution's resistance to reform and innovative policy change, and also its remarkable persistence and resilience as a representative assembly.

Reading *The Electoral Connection* amid the upheavals on the Hill, and then grappling with it in my undergraduate and graduate courses back in Austin, I found Mayhew's theory of Congress mesmerizing as a model of the kind of simple and elegant yet comprehensive argument to which I aspired in my work. Yet I also sensed that it was limited in its capacity to explain the processes of change under way in Congress. The critical issues troubling me found their clear articulation in a question from an undergraduate student in the first course I taught after returning to Austin: how could the reelection motive, so powerful in explaining the decentralized, individualized and particularized politics of the early postwar Congress explain the recentralized, party-oriented and collective policy-making orientation of the reformed Congress? This question, stated in a starkly simplified and pointed query in front of 200 undergraduates—who had heard me lecture at length first on *The Electoral Connection* as the core explanatory perspective of the course and then on the centralizing reforms I had witnessed the previous year—left me red-faced and speechless. I had no answer at hand.

With this question, the central puzzle at the heart of the work in this volume emerged. To this day I reflect on the pivotal effect of that moment on my life and career, continuing to wonder if I would have seen as clearly and powerfully this puzzle without the question posed so innocently by that undergraduate—whose name I never learned but to whom I remain so deeply indebted. What is clear is my great debt to David Mayhew. His stimulating effort to develop a goal-oriented theory that could explain the politics, organizational structure, and policy processes of Congress pointed me towards a goal-oriented approach to explaining changes in its politics, structure and policy processes. At issue was how best to craft, develop and expand such a perspective.

II. The Development and Plan of the Book

My theoretical pilgrimage—my effort to build a theory of congressional politics that might have the elegant simplicity of a Downs or Mayhew while also being true to the complexity and dynamics of American politics—began with the articulation of a simple paradox. Politicians run for Congress, I proposed, in order to acquire power and policy-making influence within it, with reelection to Congress being essential to gaining power and policy-making influence but a relatively empty and limited goal without it. To aid in acquiring personal policy-making power, I maintained, members decentralize organizational power and

resources within Congress, thereby increasing their prospect of rising to positions of influence while also gaining resources and visibility that can aid their reelection. And yet if they decentralize Congress too much, in efforts to maximize their personal reelection, policy influence, and power concerns, they upend its capacity for strong and coordinated action. In doing so, they undermine the governing power of Congress and thus the value of their power within it.

Struggling with the inherent tradeoff between personal power and the power of the institution, legislators will push initially for decentralization of Congress in order to serve their personal power and reelection concerns, doing so across decades of time somewhat unaware of the longer term consequences of their efforts. As they relentlessly push fragmentation and decentralization they put the constitutional authority and governing capacity of the institution at risk. Then over the long-run, confronted with presidential aggrandizement of power amid the weakening of Congress, members eventually move to recentralize power within Congress and resuscitate its constitutional authority. In doing so, they accept broad limits on members' personal power prerogatives and electoral resources in order to strengthen the institution. Ironically, they also invariably maneuver to protect their own special constituency interests, policy concerns and power bases, so that multiple goals across innumerable members and factions in Congress constrain and complicate centralizing reform, building glitches into the reforms that subsequently insure their unraveling.

Across time, fueled by members multiple contending goals and the contradictory purposes built into the reformed structure of Congress, organizational fragmentation will recur and future generations must again reform the institution, so that cycles of fragmentation and centralization become the defining attribute of congressional change. Moreover, I proposed, careerist legislators will likely generate increased levels of fragmentation, cycle by cycle, so Congress will drift across reform eras towards increased decentralization, progressively eroding its policy-making capacity unless institutional centralization is shored up through well-designed constitutional reforms.

The power paradox and the cyclical argument that flows from it—first presented in “Congress and the Quest for Power” (Chapter Two, published in 1977)—constituted my attempt to answer the question posed by my undergraduate student. In the decades prior to the 1970s, from this perspective, power-seeking legislators had generated growing decentralization and fragmentation in Congress, undercutting its capacity for coordinated leadership and thereby making it susceptible to presidential intrusion into its power prerogatives. The result was the imperial presidency of Richard Nixon, which so clearly seemed to challenge the foreign and domestic policy influence of Congress (Schlesinger, 1974). The reforms of the 1970s were efforts to recentralize congressional power and strengthen its institutional authority, enhancing both the power of Congress and the value of long-term service in it by placing limits on the personal autonomy, power and resources of individual members.

Initially I believed that “Quest” provided the simple, elegant and yet dynamic theory of Congress that I was seeking. My students and professional colleagues soon convinced me otherwise. Over the subsequent thirty-five years or so their critiques and queries posed one overarching challenge: *Just how Determinative and Predictable are the Cycles of Fragmentation and Recentralization in Shaping and Reshaping Congress?* This overarching challenge has generated four broad subsidiary questions:

1. Does historical context and bicameralism matter?
2. Do political parties and interparty competition foster change?
3. Where is the role for human agency, ideas and creative innovation?
4. Can the answers to these questions be integrated into an empirically credible theory?

In retrospect, these questions grabbed my attention in a sequential manner, generating a series of theoretical essays that gradually expanded the theory of cycles in a step by step and staged—if unanticipated—manner. This volume presents ten core essays that chart this development, organizing them into four parts that reflect the four questions above. The essays are presented by date of initial publication.

Each of these previously published essays will be preceded in this volume by an Abstract that summarizes the essay’s argument and followed by a section entitled “Additional Perspective.” These sections provide a third-person retrospect which details the concerns I had in writing the essay, the scholarly work I built on in crafting it, subsequent publications by other scholars that speak to the issues raised in the essay, and suggestions for ways in which the essay can be incorporated into undergraduate classes and graduate seminars. The Abstracts and Additional Perspectives provide a more extensive framing of each chapter and its place in the development of my work than I can present in this Preface. Here simply let me provide a broad roadmap.

Part One: Member Goals and Institutional Context

The first question that occupied me following the publication of “Quest” dealt with the role of context in congressional change. “Quest” had situated my cyclical argument in a time and place, focusing on the politics of the mid-twentieth century and linking the cycles back to the late nineteenth century. But it did not explicitly address the role that changes in social, constitutional or institutional context play in shaping the cycles or in influencing their outcome.

Written and published between 1975 and 1985, the essays in Part One examine the interplay between the careerist goals of legislators and historical-contextual factors generating and impinging on cyclical change. As noted, Chapter Two, “Congress and the Quest for Power” (1977), is the foundation essay of the book. It describes the reforms of the 1970s and presents the initial formulation of the