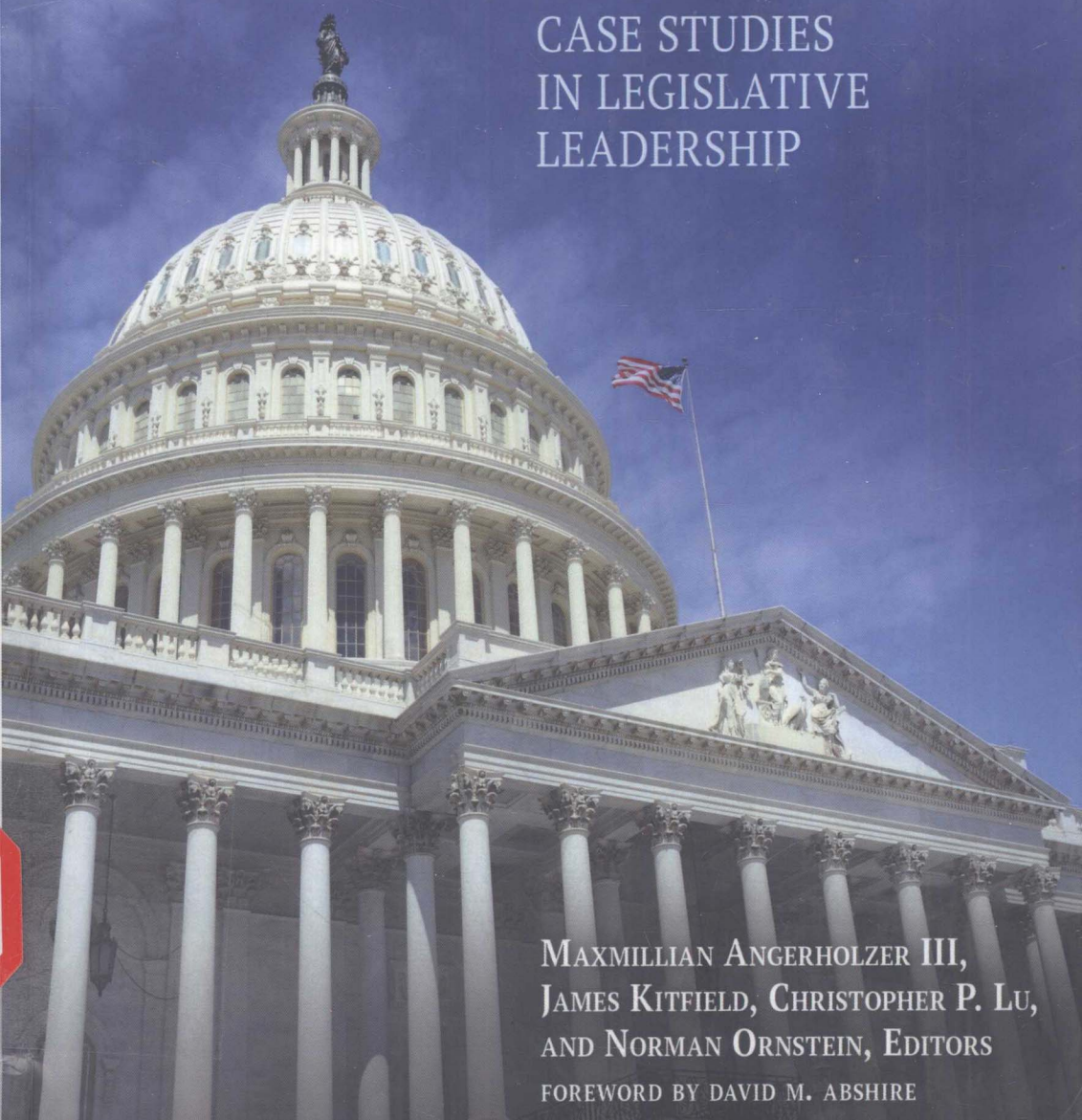




CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE
PRESIDENCY & CONGRESS

TRIUMPHS AND TRAGEDIES OF THE MODERN CONGRESS

CASE STUDIES
IN LEGISLATIVE
LEADERSHIP



MAXMILLIAN ANGERHOLZER III,
JAMES KITFIELD, CHRISTOPHER P. LU,
AND NORMAN ORNSTEIN, EDITORS

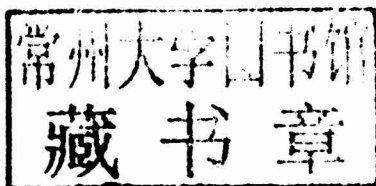
FOREWORD BY DAVID M. ABSHIRE

Triumphs and Tragedies of the Modern Congress

Case Studies in Legislative Leadership

MAXMILLIAN ANGERHOLZER III,
JAMES KITFIELD,
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Presidential Studies Quarterly (ISSN 0360-4918)

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Saving the Reagan Presidency, by David M. Abshire (Texas A&M University Press, 2005)

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Foreword

In 1998, when I took the reins of the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress from the great Gordon Hoxie, I immediately understood that this organization sat on a wealth of powerful historical lessons for today's policy makers. As Mark Twain purportedly said, "history doesn't repeat itself, but it can rhyme." One of the first projects we embarked upon was *Triumphs and Tragedies of the Modern Presidency*, where the case study model was used to examine the Executive. Now, we turn our attention to the Congress.

During my long career in Washington, I have seen, firsthand, the highs and lows of Congress—both the members and the institution. There have been times when Congress has risen to the challenge, sought compromise over political gain, made our nation stronger, and brought us to higher ground. Other times, I have seen politics, partisanship, and rivalries delay or derail needed action.

I have seen how presidents have worked closely with Congress, developing policies and legislation that move the nation. I experienced the dysfunction when Congress and the President choose secrecy and political combat instead of the national interest.

Congress—foremost among the institutions built by our founders—is often a place of inefficiencies and idiosyncrasies. Henry Clay, arguably our first great congressional leader, is the prototype for today. Leadership, character, and strategic thinking are necessary attributes for the men and women whom we elect to represent us.

The leaders we examine in this book have exemplified these characteristics. At times they have been overcome by their shortcomings. Understanding the

successes and failures of these individuals is a vital tool for today's leaders, and those of tomorrow. When it is hard to understand what impact an individual can have among a body of 535, these case studies illustrate a path forward.

Our examination of domestic and foreign policy case studies demonstrate the role of Congress in shaping both our nation and the world. Congress, in times of crisis, can quickly act. At other times, congressional deadlock and inaction seems to exacerbate the predicament. These lessons show that Congress often moves at its own pace, yet manages to rise to the challenge.

Finally, when Congress has examined the scandals that have rocked our faith in our elected officials, it has been driven by institutional prerogative, political motivations, and a quest for the truth.

At a time when perceptions of Congress and its partisanship are at their lowest, these lessons allow us—as leaders, as scholars, and as voters—to better understand how the Congress—the institution and its members—can continue to help make this nation prosperous and secure.

Ambassador David M. Abshire, PhD

Introduction

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower called for the establishment of what would become the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress (CSPC), the Supreme Allied Commander turned President lamented the lack of historical case studies to prepare him for civilian political leadership. As a military leader, he could pour over analyses of previous battles, deployments, and international crises, yet no similar repository of institutional memory existed for the equally complex arts of governing and legislating.

In 2000, CSPC published *Triumphs and Tragedies of the Modern Presidency*, a collection of case studies focused on the complexities of presidential leadership—a modern fulfillment of President Eisenhower’s wish. With this current anthology, we now turn our attention to the Legislative Branch and the intricate dynamics of leadership, procedure, and politics involved in exercising the myriad responsibilities of the Congress.

Today, the public perception of Congress—along with many of our other political institutions—is at its nadir. Partisan sniping and legislative deadlock feed a narrative that Congress is unable to address the nation’s challenges. However, as many of these case studies illustrate, partisanship and rivalry are not unique to the current political environment.

As these case studies reveal, the pace of change in Congress is sometimes very rapid. At other times it can seem glacial, especially in response to immediate challenges or fast-moving crises. However, as these case studies demonstrate, Congress more often than not has been able to find its way to reasonable solutions to the biggest challenges facing our nation. In choosing these case studies, we thus looked not only for examples that stand on their

own as significant legislative accomplishments, but also for major milestones that helped shape modern America as we know it today. The stories they tell speak of leadership, compromise, and coalition building, as well as to the challenges of partisanship, unwieldy caucuses, and personal foibles.

The initial case studies serve as a virtual “Congress 101,” providing the reader with an overview of the constitutional dynamics of the Legislative Branch; congressional committees and the importance of rules and procedures in determining legislative outcomes; the impact of the increasingly permanent election campaign; and one particularly strong outside force that influences Congress—lobbyists.

We next profile some of the major figures of the modern Congress. Although each of these leaders has left an indelible mark on Congress—and the country—this list is not meant to be exhaustive. Entire volumes could be filled with the stories of famous—and infamous—members of Congress. The selections we made span the 20th and early 21st centuries, and provide both partisan and bicameral balance.

In the case study of Sam Rayburn, you can see the impact of a congressional leader who eschewed the spotlight in favor of behind-the-scenes work and socialization with his colleagues. Gerald Ford’s time in the House of Representatives illustrates how personal relationships and the esteem of colleagues can assist in a politician’s rise to power. Tip O’Neill’s major legislative accomplishments were enabled by an unusually close cooperation between a Speaker and a President, despite sharp ideological differences. The story of Dan Rostenkowski illustrates the power of committee chairmen, and the pitfalls of failing to understand changing political winds. Newt Gingrich’s tenure traces an arc of revolutionary leadership, political hubris, and bipartisan reform, while the story of Tom DeLay is one of ruthless political maneuvering. Dennis Hastert’s story shows how even seemingly “accidental” leaders can have a lasting impact. And Nancy Pelosi’s historic rise to the Speakership is a powerful example of the changing demographics of Congress and the ability to effect change in a brief period of time.

The story of Richard Russell illuminates the Senate as it was for much of the 20th century, when rules and procedures were too often used to stymie needed reforms and national renewal. Robert Taft’s case study shows how the personality of one individual can have an outsized impact on a specific policy, even when that policy is being overtaken by a changing world. Our examination of Lyndon Johnson, by one senior member of his administration, shows how a president can use not only his legislative experience, but also a national mood of sorrow, to advance a legislative agenda.

Perhaps no politician personified a political philosophy like Jesse Helms, while the story of Ted Kennedy is one of historic victories, crushing defeats, and close friendships—personal and political. The story of Sam Nunn, as told through the eyes of David M. Abshire, a former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, shows how an influential member of Congress can help drive foreign policy through shrewd action and strategic acumen. The story of Dick Lugar is not only a testament to bipartisanship and expertise in a specific area—again foreign policy—but also a cautionary tale about the risks of political moderation in a polarized era. Finally, the story of John McCain, as told by Joe Lieberman, one of his closest colleagues, is a tale of uncommon leadership and character, resident in a man with the vision of a “maverick” and an instinct for reaching across the aisle.

In examining major domestic policy accomplishments, we look at how Congress overcame significant obstacles, from within and without, to shape modern American life for the better. While the public may think that most legislation moves through the orderly process detailed in civics class and *Schoolhouse Rock* videos, many of the examples we have selected illustrate how Congress has increasingly relied on outside groups such as commissions, or the expertise of key members, to craft legislation. In some circumstances, an actively engaged public has helped move Congress to action. In others, Congress has functioned better away from the public spotlight.

While it may be hard to imagine similar progress on some of today’s hot button issues—immigration, our tenuous national finances, climate change—Congress has risen to the challenge in the past. Civil rights, Medicare, Social Security reform, and tax reform are just some of the legislative milestones by which Congress has put its imprint on modern America.

For those affected by injustice or prejudice, Congress has often seemed to move too slowly, but there have also been momentous civil rights victories. Major reforms often required tenacious efforts from key leaders or a determined group of legislators. In some areas, Congress found it needed to reform itself to keep up with a changing America. In other, rarer, cases, Congress found itself able to act to stave off a crisis.

In the case studies that we have selected for foreign and security policy, we examine the role that Congress has played in shaping America’s global leadership, and the changing balance between congressional and presidential power in matters of national security. Even as the Commander in Chief has become increasingly powerful through the World War II, Cold War, and post-Cold War eras—and now through the post-9/11 era—Congress has made pivotal decisions regarding security at home and abroad. As the title of this book suggests, there are tragedies as well as triumphs in the telling.

In the long run-up to World War II, for instance, with Nazi Germany conquering much of Europe and Imperial Japan ascendant in Asia, isolationists in Congress tried to impede President Roosevelt's ability to come to the aid of Great Britain, or raise an army at home. Conversely, by passing the National Security Act of 1947, Congress helped build the national security architecture that would ultimately prevail in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. In passing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution of 1964, Congress essentially gave President Johnson a blank check for war, foreshadowing the tragic U.S. military escalation in Vietnam. Largely as a result, Congress in the 1970s passed the War Powers Act to limit a Commander in Chief's ability to use military force without congressional approval; established the Church and Pike Commissions to rein in excesses by the intelligence and law enforcement communities; and established an all-volunteer military to quell protests against the wartime draft.

With the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, Congress took the lead and successfully pushed through the most sweeping reforms of the Pentagon and U.S. military since 1947. During the post-Cold War military drawdown of the 1990s, Congress also established the successful Base Realignment and Closure Commission to overcome institutional resistance to closing military bases in home districts. As bookends in the ongoing struggle for war powers between Congress and the White House, the Iraq war resolutions of 1991 and 2002 revealed just how much the balance has shifted toward the Commander in Chief in the modern era. Similarly, the Patriot Act of 2001 showed once again how power accrues to the Executive Branch in times of national crisis. The congressionally mandated "9/11 Commission," which investigated the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was a modern hallmark of congressional oversight, while the Iraq Study Group of 2006 represents a failed attempt by Congress to change the President's wartime strategy.

The lessons within all these case studies can inform future national security decision making, and provide a sense of how some dynamics—partisanship, leadership, procedural matters—are impacted by foreign threats.

Finally, we conclude with an examination of Congress's role in our nation's greatest political scandals. In these case studies, we explore how the Congress investigated wrongdoing by the President and the highest officials in the White House, and how these scandals affected both the political dynamics within Congress, as well as the balance between Executive and Legislative powers.

There's no doubt that Congress has changed much over the past century, and over the past decade: fundraising has taken on greater importance; friendships across the aisle are rarer; the media landscape has become more

fragmented; special interest groups have taken on a greater role; political parties have become more ideologically defined and more polarized; and the Internet has transformed the relationship between lawmakers and their constituents. Nevertheless, the lessons of history contained in this book remind us of the pivotal role played by Congress in improving the economic and social well-being of the American people and projecting American leadership around the world. If the United States is to maintain its prominent position in the future, then Congress must search for ways to overcome its divisions and confront the serious challenges facing our country.

*Maxmillian Angerholzer III, Christopher
P. Lu, James Kitfield, and Norman Ornstein*

Contents

Foreword	xv
<i>David M. Abshire, PhD</i>	
Introduction	xvii
<i>Maxmillian Angerholzer III, Christopher P. Lu, James Kitfield, and Norman Ornstein</i>	
Section I: “Congress 101”	1
1 An “Invitation to Struggle”: Congress and the Constitution	3
<i>Norman Ornstein</i>	
2 Building Blocks of Legislation: Congressional Committees and Procedures	8
<i>C. Lawrence Evans</i>	
3 Zero-Sum Governing: The Permanent Campaign	17
<i>Norman Ornstein</i>	
4 The Influence Business: Lobbying in Washington	22
<i>Lee Drutman</i>	
Section II: The Individuals Who Shaped the Modern Congress	31
5 Sam Rayburn: The Power of Persuasion	33
<i>Anthony Champagne</i>	
6 Gerald Ford: A Politician without Enemies	37
<i>Richard Reeves</i>	

7	Thomas “Tip” O’Neill: New Deal Champion <i>John A. Farrell</i>	41
8	Dan Rostenkowski: The Deal-Maker <i>Richard Cohen</i>	47
9	Newt Gingrich: The Partisan Revolutionary <i>Linda Killian</i>	53
10	Tom DeLay: Power and Hubris <i>Jan Reid</i>	60
11	Dennis Hastert: The Accidental Speaker <i>Michael Dorning</i>	65
12	Nancy Pelosi: The Pioneer <i>Elaine S. Povich</i>	69
13	Richard Russell Jr.: Patriarch of the Senate <i>Sheryl B. Vogt</i>	74
14	Robert A. Taft: Mr. Republican <i>James Patterson</i>	80
15	Lyndon B. Johnson: Presidential Legislator <i>Joseph A. Califano Jr.</i>	86
16	Jesse Helms: The Unapologetic Conservative <i>David B. Frisk</i>	91
17	Edward “Ted” Kennedy: A Liberal Lion <i>Susan Milligan</i>	98
18	Sam Nunn: Strategic Leadership <i>David M. Abshire</i>	102
19	Richard G. Lugar: Statesman of the Senate <i>John T. Shaw</i>	108
20	John McCain: The Happy Warrior <i>Joe Lieberman</i>	112
	Section III: Congress and Domestic Policy	117
21	Regulating Sunrise and Sunset: The Long Arm of the Commerce Clause <i>Susan Sullivan Lagon</i>	119

22	In Roosevelt's Shadow: The New Deal Congress <i>Patrick Maney</i>	125
23	Dawn of a New Era: Building the Modern Congress <i>Ross K. Baker</i>	130
24	Defeating Jim Crow: The 1965 Voting Rights Act <i>Kareem U. Crayton</i>	133
25	Great Society Milestones: Medicare and Medicaid <i>Marilyn Moon</i>	139
26	The Power of the Purse: Rethinking Runaway Debt and a Broken Budgeting Process <i>Jason J. Fichtner</i>	145
27	Myth and Reality of the Safety Net: The 1983 Social Security Reforms <i>Rudolph G. Penner</i>	152
28	Bygone Bipartisanship: The Tax Reform Act of 1986 <i>Richard Cohen</i>	157
29	Grand Bargain or Grand Collapse: The Case of Immigration Reform <i>Muzaffar Chishti and Charles Kamasaki</i>	163
30	Showdown over Judicial Nominations: Robert Bork <i>Mark Gitenstein</i>	171
31	A Republican Revolution: The 1994 Contract with America <i>Linda Killian</i>	175
32	Compromise amid Bitter Partisanship: The Welfare Reform Law of 1996 <i>Ron Haskins</i>	183
33	The Backfire of Unintended Consequences: The 1997 Balanced Budget Act <i>Scott Lilly</i>	188
34	Before Money Was Speech: Campaign Finance Reform <i>Susan Milligan</i>	195
35	Federal Reform of Education: No Child Left Behind <i>Patrick McGuinn</i>	201

Section IV: Congress and National Security	211
36 FDR versus Congressional Isolationists: The Road to World War II <i>Carl Cannon</i>	213
37 A Superpower's Foundation: The National Security Act of 1947 <i>Katherine A. Scott</i>	225
38 Un-American Investigations: McCarthyism and the Red Scare <i>Ellen Schrecker</i>	231
39 A Blank Check for War: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution <i>Marvin Kalb</i>	238
40 From Draftees to Professionals: The All-Volunteer Force <i>James Kitfield</i>	245
41 Congress Takes a Stand: The 1973 War Powers Resolution <i>Dan Mahaffee</i>	253
42 Shining a Light on Spycraft: The Church and Pike Committees <i>Loch K. Johnson</i>	263
43 Against All Odds: The Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization <i>James Kitfield</i>	269
44 The Triumph of Process over Politics: The Base Closure Commissions <i>David Berteanu</i>	278
45 A Powers Tug-of-War: The Iraq War Resolutions <i>James Kitfield</i>	287
46 An Imperfect Compromise: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" <i>James Kitfield</i>	294
47 License to Spy: The USA PATRIOT Act <i>James Kitfield</i>	300
48 Reforming National Intelligence: The 9/11 Commission <i>Michael Allen</i>	306
49 Changing Course in a Time of War: Congress and the 2006 Iraq Study Group <i>Jordan Tama</i>	311