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Vital Statistics on Congress, 1984-1985 Edition

Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann,
Michael J. Malbin, Allen Schick,
John F. Bibby

Foreword by Richard F. Fenno, Jr.

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MEMBERS

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ELECTIONS • CAMPAIGN

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FINANCE • COMMITTEES • STAFF AND

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OPERATING EXPENSES • ELECTIONS

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ROLL CALL VOTING • CAMPAIGN FINANCE

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ELECTIONS • BUDGETING • MEMBERS


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STAFF AND OPERATING EXPENSES • ACTIVITY

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**Vital Statistics
on Congress,
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President's Foreword

One of the first goals of AEI's Congress Project in 1978–1979 was to put together a single-source, easy-to-use handbook containing information on all aspects of Congress. The project's scholars had regularly searched for data for their own research and had frequently been called by journalists, librarians, other scholars, and politicians for information on Congress and the legislative process. They reasoned that a biennial volume pulling together the most significant facts, figures, and trends would be of use to the various communities that work in or follow Congress and would make their own lives easier.

They were wrong on the latter count—the amount of work necessary to create *Vital Statistics on Congress* is tremendous—but they were right on target about their first goal. As *Vital Statistics* goes into its third edition, much changed and expanded from the first, it has become a standard reference in newsrooms, libraries, and classrooms around the country. It is even used as a reference on Congress by Congress itself. *Vital Statistics on Congress* has become a vital part of the continuing mission of the AEI Congress Project. This third edition will be followed by others, tracking the politics, people, and policy process on Capitol Hill.

WILLIAM J. BAROODY, JR.
President
American Enterprise Institute

Foreword

"Congress is the best known and the least understood of our national political institutions." That statement will probably win you a consensus. "Congress is the most fascinating of our national political institutions." That statement will probably get you an argument. But it will quickly flush out those legions of Congress watchers who derive much of their education or their enjoyment or their exasperation from following the activities of the legislative branch.

Congress watchers come in many varieties, from political science students who are required to pay attention to Congress to political junkies who cannot imagine life without it. In between are a host of people who do a lot of thinking about Congress, people whose professional lives are tied to the institution—teachers, journalists, staffers, politicians, consultants, lobbyists, and legislators themselves. It is for all such people that this book has been written.

Congress may never rival the weather or baseball as a staple of casual conversation in America. Maybe that is just as well. Those who like to talk about Congress certainly lack the statistical base provided by the Weather Bureau and the *Sporting News*. As one senator commented in a recent interview, "People have asked me how to make the Senate more interesting. I tell them that you need to keep the kinds of statistics that they keep about baseball, the ones I devoured as a boy."

No doubt widespread interest precedes the development of statistics in such matters. But the collection and presentation of statistics surely enlivens whatever interest already exists and probably expands it. Further, the existence of more and better statistics probably raises the level of conversation and improves the sense of perspective on the subject. Such, at least, is the hope of the authors of *Vital Statistics on Congress, 1984–1985 Edition*.

As every Congress watcher knows, our national legislature is a decentralized and fragmented institution. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to find that the development of statistics about Congress has been an equally decentralized and fragmented enterprise. What, we might ask, do Michael Barone, Charles Brownson, Joseph Cantor, Albert Cover, Louis Fisher, Harrison Fox, Benjamin Guthrie,

Susan Hammond, Robert Keith, Mildred Lehmann, Judy Schneider, and Daniel Strickland have in common? They are all collectors of congressional statistics; they have all contributed, indirectly, to this volume. So, too, have some anonymous researchers at the Congressional Research Service, *Congressional Quarterly*, the Congressional Budget Office, the Federal Election Commission, and Common Cause. And so have the authors of this book. The American Enterprise Institute does not have the data-gathering resources of the Weather Bureau or the *Sporting News*. But it does have a group of first-rate congressional scholars who have pieced together and created, from dozens of disparate sources, a stimulating compilation of statistics to help the rest of us talk and think about Congress.

Vital Statistics on Congress, 1984–1985 Edition, is the second biennial update of the original 1980 volume. The 1982 edition was a greatly expanded version of the first. This volume is primarily an update. But it contains new arrays of data in the fast-changing areas of campaign finance and budgeting. And again there is a lengthy appendix with information on each legislator. But the book is not about individuals. It is resolutely a book about Congress as an institution. Its statistics are about overall congressional performance, about groups of legislators, categories of legislators, and their behavior. It is about the House and the Senate taken together and taken separately. It is about elections and parties, about staffs and committees. Its statistics are aggregate statistics, designed to present an overall institutional perspective.

Thus it is neither a replacement for nor a competitor of *Politics in America* or the *Almanac of American Politics*, both of which detail the careers, the constituencies, and the legislative records of 535 individual legislators, one by one. *Vital Statistics* is a companion volume to them—a necessary one, for it provides an institutional scrutiny to frame their concern for individual legislators. *Vital Statistics* is also a companion volume to the daily newspaper and the nightly news, which focus on the stories of the present and not on relations with the past. This book emphasizes precisely what various other sources of our information neglect—collectivities more than individuals, patterned activity over time more than discrete happenings in the here and now.

Change is the law of institutional life. Accordingly, the statistics in this volume give us a lengthy time perspective on each subject. The book charts changes in matters from election patterns to the costs of running Congress. And it marks, in its eight interpretive introductions, milestones along the way, in areas from committee performance to partisan voting patterns. At the same time, many kinds of comparisons can be made at a single time. This is especially true of compari-

sons between the House and the Senate but also of those between parties, among committees, and, in the appendix, among individual members. Whether statistics are examined over time or in cross sections, they are available both for instant use and for prolonged reflection.

Many people watch Congress intently because they consider it the most sensitive barometer of our national yet locally derived politics. There is plenty of statistical evidence here for that view: the steady increase in party defection in voting for the House, the steady increase in the costs of political campaigns, the slow rise to national power of women and blacks, the steady growth of expertise in government, the emerging difficulty of controlling the federal budget. Many of these data confirm for us what we already know, but they give us a better basis for knowing. They will be immediately useful as raw material for the conversation of Congress watchers.

There are plenty of puzzles here, too. Some are as much puzzles for 1984 as they were for 1982. Why, after a steady increase of various forms of congressional activity, should so many indicators of such activity have started to decline? Why, in most recent years, should incumbent senators be so much less successful in winning reelection than House members? Why should such a marked increase have occurred in the number of amendments, proposed and passed, to appropriations measures in the House? Why, if party-line voting is decreasing among the electorate, should it not be decreasing similarly inside Congress? Why should the defense policy committees of both chambers rank consistently among the most conservative in their makeup while the foreign policy committees of both chambers rank just as consistently among the most liberal? What effect might this difference have on congressional policy making in these closely related policy areas?

Other puzzles are newly accented by changes in political life since the last edition of *Vital Statistics*. It is startling to read that the increase in campaign expenditures between 1980 and 1982 was "the largest single two-year increase" and that increases in campaign expenditures continue to far outpace increases in the cost of living. A trend already drawing national attention is apparently accelerating. What is happening here? Are candidate qualifications, campaign techniques, and policy outcomes changing at the same breakneck speed as campaign expenditures, or are things pretty much business as usual in congressional life?

When the 1982 volume went to press, Ronald Reagan was enjoying spectacular success in pushing his legislative program through Congress. This book records a change in that level of success. And it

records the increased polarization of politics in committee and on the floor of both chambers. These data raise the questions, Why? and With what effect? Fuel for discussion of these questions can be found in the new data on budgeting. In those data we find evidence of declining presidential success and greater party polarization. Equally intriguing is the steady growth in budget-related roll calls. Is this growth a product of the Reagan presidency, or is it evidence of a longer-term trend? And don't the data of chapter 7 tell us that Congress is slowly losing control of the budget process—see the use of continuing resolutions, the use of supplementals, the disuse of the second budget resolution—at the very time when budget questions are crowding the legislative agenda? What is cause? What is effect?

With this third edition, *Vital Statistics* is taking its place as a reliable landmark for people who watch the legislative landscape for evidence of stability and of change. As the various time series lengthen, so does an ability to distinguish the more stable from the more changing features of that landscape. Thinking about change and stability with respect to our legislative institution may encourage a similar perspective on the context within which Congress exists. In time it may even be widely conceded that Congress is the best known, the best understood, and the most fascinating of our national political institutions. Probably not. Among the readers of *Vital Statistics*, however, the debate over these questions will be better informed. There might even be a few freshly recruited Congress watchers to participate in it.

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Acknowledgments

The third edition of this book involved the efforts of a number of people. Even though this edition does not have many completely new tables, the work involved in researching, calculating, checking and rechecking even an updated table or chart is immense. Jim Barnes, Jill Pearlman, Tom Skladony, and Ron Latz carried much of the burden, building on the base formed by Nina Kerstiens, Chuck Coughlin, and others. Suggestions, assistance, and corrections for this edition came from Roger Davidson, Dick Fenno, Pat Patterson, Fred Pauls, and many others. A special acknowledgment must go to the AEI publications staff, whose professional efforts, as always, were consistent and thorough, and contributed greatly to the quality of this volume.

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