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PREFACE

The American Congress has long been one of the most powerful legislative bodies in the world. Congress is now struggling with momentous issues such as the regulation of the health care industry, public investment in rapidly changing electronic technologies, campaign finance reform, the war against terrorism, and the place of the United States in the post-Cold War world. These issues present a serious challenge. They affect the interests of all Americans, they are highly controversial, and they involve technical subjects and complex 'public policies.

Our goal in writing this edition is to instill in students and general readers an appreciation for the importance of a strong legislature in the American democracy. Such an appreciation requires an understanding of the constitutional setting in which Congress operates, the basic rules of the electoral and legislative processes, and the resources and strategies of members of Congress and other key players. Each chapter is designed to contribute to the reader's understanding by introducing key concepts, describing essential details of the process, and outlining general principles for understanding the subject.

In our efforts to introduce you to congressional politics, we have not hidden our enthusiasm for the subject. To be sure, Congress is easy to dislike and often difficult to defend. The rough-and-tumble world of legislating is not orderly and civil, human frailties too often taint its membership, and legislative outcomes are often frustrating and ineffective. Still, we are not exaggerating when we say that Congress is essential to American democracy. We would not have survived as a nation without a Congress that represented the diverse interests of our society, conducted a public debate on the major issues, found compromises to resolve conflicts peacefully, and limited the power of our executive, military, and judicial institutions.

Features of This Edition

We initiate the first free textbook in political science with this online version of the third edition. The business model for this enterprise lacks some important features, such as royalties for the authors. But we view this endeavor as an educational one, supported by a research institute, the Weidenbaum Center on the Economy, Government, and Public Policy at Washington University in St. Louis.

Nothing is sacrificed in this text. The text is completely updated. The text has retained all of the major features of the second edition. Its distinctive features include full chapters on Congress's relationship with the executive branch, judicial branch, and interest groups. Each chapter is informed by the most recent and thoughtful research on congressional politics without burdening the student with unnecessary details.

The pdf format allows the reader to print the book and carry a hard copy while retaining the full formatting of tables, figures, and photos. The files can be downloaded and read at any time.

Web distribution also allows us to provide frequent updates of the chapters to account for new developments in congressional politics. The website for the text (congress.wustl.edu/) and the chapters themselves will always indicate the date at which each chapter was last updated. Most chapters will be updated at least once each year.

Reading the chapters on the computer in pdf format offers important advantages. The electronic version allows the reader to gain easy access to the online material for which web links are provided on our website. We hope that all instructors, students, and general readers will take advantage of the online resources that are available on the book's website—congress.wustl.edu/. You will find

- a bibliography on congressional politics that extends far beyond what you can find in any bound book,
- unpublished papers written by scholars of congressional politics that will introduce you to some of the best and most recent research,
- links to online sources of quantitative data on congressional politics,
- an outline for a graduate seminar on legislative politics, and
- links to web sites of official and unofficial sources on congressional politics.

Please send us your suggestions for additions to the online resources available at congress.wustl.edu.

Organization of the Text

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of the condition of the modern Congress. The chapter gives the reader a look at the general trends in American politics that are shaping the character of congressional policy making. It also reviews recent developments that have altered the distribution of power within the institution.

Chapters 2 and 3 survey both constitutional and internal legislative rules to give an integrated perspective on the legislative game. The special character of American national legislative politics is the product of the Constitution, which created three institutions—the House of Representatives, Senate, and president—and set rules governing their interaction in the process of enacting public laws. In addition, the House and the Senate have developed complex rules and practices that have a substantial effect on public policy.

Chapter 4 focuses on congressional elections. It covers the fundamental rules that govern elections and details the advantages enjoyed by congressional incumbents in their efforts to stay in office. The chapter concludes by evaluating the importance of election outcomes for the policy choices made by Congress and the president.

Chapter 5 focuses on individual members. It begins by reviewing the variety of political goals that members pursue. It also considers the resources that members may mobilize in pursuit of their goals and the political actors who influence members' behavior. The chapter concludes by looking at the strategies that members pursue in the case of voting and policy leadership.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 concern the central components of the legislative process—parties, committees, and the chamber floors. Parties and committees are not mentioned in the Constitution, and yet the interaction of parties and committees defines the decision-making process in the modern Congress. The emphasis is on both the development of congressional parties and committees and recent changes that have altered the character of congressional decision making in important ways. Chapter 8, while detailing the activity that takes place on the House and Senate floors, concludes with an overall perspective on how parties, committees, and the floors are related to each other.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 consider the major institutions and organizations with which Congress interacts—the president and executive branch, the courts, and interest groups. In each case, the emphasis is on the way in which resources and strategies of the institution or organization affect its relations with Congress.

Budget politics and process are the concern of Chapter 12. Budget politics has become a nearly dominant feature of congressional politics, and many important procedural developments have occurred in recent years. This chapter emphasizes the importance of the evolving budget process for the distribution of power in Congress.

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Reviewers of previous editions contributed to the text in many ways. Reviewers included Ross K. Baker, Gerald Blasi, Paul Frymer, Linda Fowler, Paul Gronke, Rhonda Kinney, Bernard Kolasa, Karen M. McCurdy, Sharyn O’Halloran, Bruce Oppenheimer, Glenn Parker, Joseph B. Parker, Brian Sala, Randall Strahan, Daniel Ward, and Norman L. Zucker.

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Steven S. Smith, Jason Roberts, and Ryan Vander Wielen