



The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction

By Donald A. Ritchie

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Many scholars believe that the framers of the Constitution intended Congress to be the preeminent branch of government. Indeed, no other legislature in the world approaches its power. Yet most Americans have only a murky idea of how it works.

In *The U.S. Congress*, Donald A. Ritchie, a congressional historian for more than thirty years, takes readers on a fascinating, behind-the-scenes tour of Capitol Hill--pointing out the key players, explaining their behavior, and translating parliamentary language into plain English. No mere civics lesson, this eye-opening book provides an insider's perspective on Congress, matched with a professional historian's analytical insight. After a swift survey of the creation of Congress by the constitutional convention, he begins to unscrew the nuts and pull out the bolts. What is it like to campaign for congress? To attract large donors? To enter either house with no seniority? He answers these questions and more, explaining committee assignments (and committee work), the role of staffers and lobbyists, floor proceedings, parliamentary rules, and coalition building. Ritchie explores the great effort put into constituent service--as representatives and senators respond to requests from groups and individuals--as well as media relations and news coverage. He also explores how the grand concepts we all know from civics class--checks and balances, advise and consent, congressional oversight--work in practice, in an age of strong presidents and a muscular Senate minority (no matter which party is in that position).

In this sparkling addition to Oxford's *Very Short Introduction* series, Donald Ritchie moves beyond the cynicism and the platitudes to provide a gem of a portrait of how Congress really works.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This is a lively, comprehensive and knowing guide to the Congress that leaves nothing out. With clarity and good humor, Donald Ritchie explains how Congress works in a way I never thought possible. His book should be read by every citizen, by every journalist, and even by every member of the Congress."--Roger Mudd, former CBS News Congressional correspondent

"This volume delivers an elegant, informative, and entertaining tour of the legislative branch. It manages to cover an impressive amount of ground with the benefit of smart organization, economical prose, and an insider's eye for what is interesting and important. In short, it is the kind of book diligent citizens should read."--Paul Charles Milazzo, Associate Professor of History, Ohio University

About the Author

Donald A. Ritchie is Historian of the U.S. Senate. His books include *Our Constitution; The Oxford Guide to the United States Government; Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents; Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps; and Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932*.

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