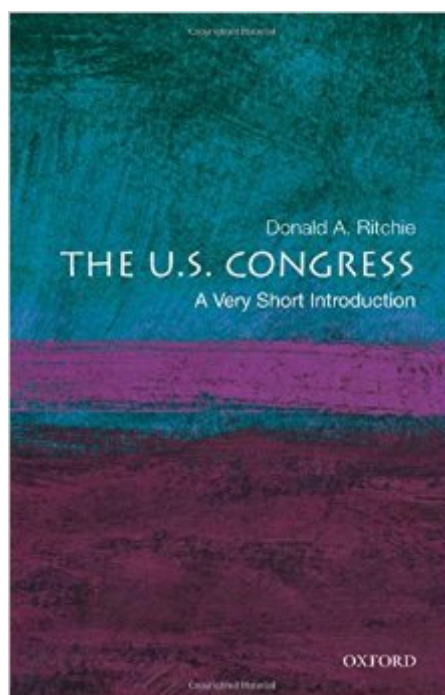


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The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The U.S. Congress. The very title draws consternation, criticism and confusion to the average American--especially to the average American. They are lost in explaining how it works from committees, to floor votes, to impeachment, to filibusters, to lobbying and backroom deals. This book explains it. It starts with the history of both houses and takes us through modern day, explaining the changes, the scandals, its heroes and villains, and the ever-changing rules of the Senate which change so often they can bring the operation of government to a standstill, and exasperate the most action-oriented senator. It explains what few people know right now--why Congress is in a furor that the White House is closed to visitors through sequestration. It also reveals how many constitutional amendments were proposed and how many were passed vs. how few reached ratification. The book would be a thorough civics lesson for the high school student if it wasn't written at a college graduate level. It is pocket-sized so it is an ideal read on the business trip, vacation, or the commute.

Excellent. A great and simple description of the House and Senate and the procedural processes and committees involved. Author Ritchie really knew his material, as a Senate historian, but did not neglect the House in this fine book.

Anyone seeking to understand the Congress needs to read Donald Ritchie's excellent book. There is no wasted fluff. This book explains and illuminates. Great job by a real insider. If you never read any other book about Congress- read this one.

Had high school students read this before their study of the Congress. Established a very solid foundation for further study. Allowed the class to take a much more in depth look at the Congress.

Arrived quickly in perfect condition, book is very well made. It is a highly informative yet brief summarization of the inner workings of Congress, and I am very pleased with it.

Great Introduction into Congress, Very easy to read. Loved it.

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