

Congressional Procedure: A Practical Guide to the Legislative Process in the U.S. Congress

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Congressional Procedure offers insider-level understanding of how legislation passes through the House and Senate, handling a dry topic with great precision and clarity.

Richard Arenberg's reference work *Congressional Procedure* explains the intricacies of the United States Senate and House of Representatives. It is a focused and detailed work that is valuable for contextualizing history and current procedures.

Organized to give a general overview of what tasks Congress takes up, the text outlines, step by step, how bills and other kinds of resolutions make their way through the two chambers. Along the way, specific rules and common processes are outlined. The text discusses exceptions and historical precedents related to how bills are drafted, revised, debated, and ultimately passed or discarded. The timing of congressional sessions and how calendars are managed are also discussed. Particular focus is given to how power is shared between opposing parties and how both the majority and minority parties in each Congress handle the balance of power.

Language is precise if dry, and drives to the point. Vocabulary and jargon-based distinctions slow the pace, and many sentences require careful readings to ensure clarity, though this is appropriate for the subject matter. Clear chapter titles and frequent subheadings make the text scannable and easy to navigate. It is an effective reference textbook, complete with an extensive index and a clear, helpful glossary of Congress-related terms.

Diagrams make more complex processes, like the route of a measure through the House and Senate, more clear and are useful in combination with the prose explanations. Especially valuable are the review questions at the end of each chapter, which are summative without getting bogged down in small details.

Two particularly interesting and engaging elements stand out. One is the book's references to historical figures involved in the creation of Congress. Quotations, such as of James Madison referencing why the Senate was formed, make it easier to trace connections between modern practice and the initial reasons for the government's development. Secondly, the text effectively addresses polarization, noting the recent trend toward party-based polarization and the lack of collaboration across the aisle. By citing specific points in the process of creating new laws where senators and representatives are collaborating less, the text advances an implicit thesis that Congress is subtly changing its way of operating to favor methods that do not require convincing very many people from opposing parties when working to pass important legislation.

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LAURA LEAVITT (November 13, 2018)

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