



How Congress Works and Why You Should Care

By Lee H. Hamilton

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How Congress Works and Why You Should Care is a concise introduction to the functions and vital role of the U.S. Congress by eminent former Congressman Lee H. Hamilton. Drawing on 34 years as a U.S. Representative, Hamilton explains how Congress reflects the diversity of the American people, serves as a forum for finding consensus, and provides balance within the federal government. Addressing widespread public misperceptions, he outlines areas where Congress can work better and ways for citizens to become more engaged in public affairs through their representatives in Washington. How Congress Works and Why You Should Care is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the inner workings of Congress, and how all citizens can participate in its unique mission.

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How Congress Works and Why You Should Care By Lee H. Hamilton Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #120980 in Books
- Published on: 2004-02-26
- Released on: 2004-02-26
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .51" w x 6.12" l, .59 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 156 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Remember that "how a bill becomes law" charts in your high school civics class? It doesn't begin to describe the "messy" process that really operates in Congress, according to Hamilton, a former congressman from Indiana who was respected on both sides of the aisle. He offers a strong defense of the institution he served from 1965 to 1999. This basic primer details the history of Congress, its importance and some of the critical actions it has taken—from the Tariff Act of 1790, which established duties on imported goods, to landmark laws of the 1960s, such as the Voting Rights Act and the bills that established Medicare and Medicaid. Hamilton also describes the "complicated and untidy" process by which Congress really works and why we "need more people who know how to practice the art of politics." Congress, he argues, acts "as the people's voice against unchecked power[;] it is the guarantor of liberty." The author is not uncritical of Congress, offering several suggestions as to how that body could improve itself. But here and elsewhere in the book, his suggestions and arguments fail to scratch much below the surface. It's hard to disagree with the statements that congressional discourse should be more civil and that citizens should be more active in politics, but Hamilton fails to address the causes of these and other problems. Still, in a cynical age, and a time of increasing presidential authority, it's encouraging to see a true, reasonable believer call for recognizing Congress as a necessary pillar of American democracy. Parents should send this primer off with their kids to college.

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Review

"A passionate and eloquent defense of the essential role Congress plays in the American constitutional system and a reasoned call for citizens to engage more actively in their representative democracy. Like Hamilton himself, this volume is scrupulously honest, fair-minded, and accessible to a wide audience."
?Thomas Mann, W. Averell Harriman Senior Fellow in American Governance, The Brookings Institution

"Lee Hamilton's new book... should be required reading for any American contemplating writing a 'Letter to the Editor' or calling into (or hosting) a radio talk show, or for that matter, stepping into a voting booth. It is an owner's manual for citizens interested in their Congress." ?Charlie Cook, Editor and Publisher, The Cook Political Report

"Lee Hamilton's book not only describes the Madisonian vision of what Congress is supposed to be and assesses how it measures up to that vision today, it also serves the same function of educating and edifying the American public that the Federalist papers did.... Every student of Congress, and every American, can benefit from this book." ?Norman J. Ornstein, Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute

"Americans cannot be faulted for having a deeply jaundiced view of their Congress, says Hamilton (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars); he ought to know, because he served as a Representative for Indiana from 1965 to 1999. But he argues that people can and should fix it rather than give up on it completely." ?SciTech Book News, February 2010

About the Author

Lee H. Hamilton was U.S. Representative from Indiana's Ninth District from 1965 to 1999. He served as Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the Joint Economic Committee, and the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress. He is now director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He lives in Bloomington, Indiana.

Users Review

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