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STRENGTHENING CONGRESS IN NATIONAL
POLICY-MAKING

In this article published in 1970, Nelson W. Polsby views Congress as an important incubator of policy innovations, but proposes three reforms to strengthen the institution: a system of mandatory retirement at age seventy for members; an improvement in the technical knowledge base available to the institution; and election of House committee chairpersons at the beginning of each new Congress. Polsby's other important works include: Congressional Behavior (1971) and Congress and the Presidency (1976). He is also the author of Presidential Elections: Strategies of American Electoral Politics (1980) with Aaron Wildavsky; Consequences of Party Reform (1983); and Political Innovation in America (1984). Polsby is a professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley.

The word is out that the Congress of the United States may have had something to do with the alteration over the past year and a half of American policy toward Southeast Asia. On the domestic scene, Congressmen can be observed taking the lead in tax reform and increasing federal appropriations for education. Consequently, it may briefly be fashionable to take Congress seriously, and perhaps those few of us who all along have been arguing this view *sotto voce* ought to say a word or two before Congress resumes its accustomed role of thwarting the domestic programs of liberal Presidents, and is once more relegated to the dustbin of historians if not of history.

To be sure it is easy enough to see why that popular guide to Washington politics, *Casual Observer*, finds Congress hard to understand. It is organized quite differently from the conventional bureaucracy, which *Casual Observer* professes to despise, but which he and his friends comprehend. Instead of having a single head, Congress looks like the hydra of Greek mythology. Instead of neatly delegating work downward and responsibility upward, Congress is a complex, redundant, not always predictable, and purposely unwieldy network of crisscrossing and overlapping lines of authority and information.

The mere contemplation of this organizational design customarily leads *Casual Observer* to assert overhastily that Congressional decision-making is inefficient, cumbersome, and in need of instant reform. Consider, for example, the frequently regretted fact that Cabinet offices are asked to justify certain aspects of their programs in much the same language before authorization and appropriation committees in both houses—four presentations in all. Clearly an inefficient use of a busy executive's time, according to the busy executive and his friends. Yet this same busy executive as a matter of course insists that programs coming

up the line to his office be justified repeatedly to program review committees, bureau chiefs, department level staff, and departmental budget officers, and he would think nothing of justifying the program again to other interested executive branch departments, to the President and the Budget Bureau. Cabinet-level officers quite commonly make presentations, formal and informal, justifying their programs to the general public, to interest groups, to newspapermen. Why, then, does the need for Congress to hear justifications as well constitute such an intolerable inconvenience? Why should this alleged inconvenience lead to recommendations that Congress revamp its structure?

Casual Observer also finds Congress hard to fathom because the political theories that are currently available do not help him resolve some basic choices that he generally has to make in order to defend his preferences with respect to the distribution of power within the national government. Does he want a strong Congress? A strong Congress means precisely one capable of asserting its will, even though Presidents, interest groups, courts, and ephemeral majorities of public opinion may find it inconvenient. A weak Congress means less effective oversight of executive policy-making and of the bureaucracies, and such weakness diminishes the capacity of Congressmen and Senators to play the roles of critic, goad, and ombudsman.* Further, he must decide whether to vest power in Congress or in the majority party within Congress. If the former, he must be prepared to tolerate coalitions which occasionally—and perhaps persistently—thwart the will of the majority of the majority party. Of such majorities are the conservative coalition—and the progressive one that unhorsed Joseph Cannon—made. If he opts for stricter party responsibility, he must accept the weakening of Congress vis-à-vis national parties, and whoever controls them—presumably quite often the President. For a long time, there were modish and unequivocal answers to these structural dilemmas, just as in the thirties *Casual Observer's* father knew what he thought of an imately reactionary institution like the Supreme Court. Now, however, while the idea of Congressional checks and balances and initiatives seem to make a little sense, it is possible to give these choices more evenhanded consideration.

The reasons why Congress and Presidents generally get along rather badly are too well known to require much reiteration. Differing constituencies arising from, on the one hand, the unit of rule of the electoral college and, on the other, from the differential effects of party competition, the residuum of malapportionment, and the seniority system account for part of the conflict. So do purely institutional factors, the most important of which is the differing time scale of Presidential and Congressional careers.

President Kennedy understood this problem quite well, as the following quotation from Theodore Sorensen's[†] book suggests:

* *Ombudsman*: see footnote on page 168.

[†] *Joseph Cannon*: see footnote on page 283.

[‡] *Theodore Sorensen*: lawyer who was an assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy (1953–1961), and Special Counsel to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson (1961–1964). He is the author of *Decision Making in the White House* (1963), *Kennedy* (1965), *The Kennedy Legacy* (1969), and *Watchmen in the Night: Presidential Accountability after Watergate* (1975).

"Wilbur Mills," he said one day, "knows that he was chairman of Ways and Means before I got here and that he'll still be chairman after I've gone—and he knows I know it. I don't have any hold on him."

More generally, the argument is that the career expectations of political actors influence the rates at which they are willing to expend resources. By the standards of the operational leaders of Congress—Congressional party leaders, committee and subcommittee chairmen, their minority counterparts, and leading up-and-coming members in both parties—the career of any President is short. In the 91st Congress considerably more than a majority of both houses had already served with at least three Presidents of the United States. More to the point, the vast majority in both houses could plausibly entertain the prospect of continuing to serve on into the indefinite future. Thus, while Presidents are under a constitutional injunction to seize the day, the men of Capitol Hill—even supposing they agree with the President and his programs—must calculate the consequences of their support against future demands upon their own resources. This leads to strategic dilemmas and to disagreements between Congress and the Presidency that are scarcely touched by proposals such as the four-year Congressional term of office, which seeks to coordinate the time of election but not the terminal points of Presidential and Congressional careers.

There is no definitive, universally acceptable answer to the question of how strong Congress should be. On the whole, gains in institutional strength are likely to be had at costs in institutional responsiveness. But there are many possible mixtures of these two qualities. A legislature that is merely an arena for the registering of the policy preferences of groups organized in the society at large is obviously not the only alternative to a legislature that is totally impervious to external sentiment. There is at present no very satisfactory description of Congress which assesses the developing balance between these somewhat incompatible goals. Thus Casual Observer is also handicapped in his attempts to understand Congress because Congress itself has been changing over the years, while our descriptions and justifications for it have not kept pace.

The accepted view of what a legislature contributes to government is that it represents the people, and it is as a representative body that Congress finds its ultimate justification in our political system. The difficulty that all modern legislatures face, of course, is the tremendous increase in the scale of modern government that makes it almost impossible for individual legislators genuinely to represent the people back home in any simple or straightforward fashion. And most legislatures collectively have pretty much stopped doing so. In most parliamentary systems, they are now mindless creatures of the political parties that run them.

But Congress is an exception. Principally because of historical accidents that destroyed the temporary unity of both the national parties earlier in this century, Congress built on some nineteenth-century precedents in ways that have maintained and in some cases enhanced its independence in the political system. One major consequence of this process of institutionalization has been to shift the balance in the careers and life-styles of legislators from amateur to professional,

from the status of temporary ambassador from home to that of member of the legislative group. Where Congress used to embody a popular will in some formal sense by its collective representativeness, it now does so *de facto* through the piecemeal pressures of case work for constituents, legislative committee hearings, and the appropriations process. Where representation, emphasizing the ambassadorial function, was once the characteristic, conscious activity of Congressmen and Senators, today it is deliberation, emphasizing the increasing centrality to Congressmen of their lives as members of a legislative work group and status system.

Thus in a sense Congress has been modernizing itself, through processes which have shifted the loyalties and the attention of Congressmen and Senators toward Washington and away from the grass roots, differentiated its internal functions, and professionalized legislative service.

However, we have not yet developed a fully articulate rationale for a legislature that takes this developmental path; instead we are still relying both descriptively and evaluatively on notions of representation that made more sense when Congressmen spent most of their time at home and came from relatively knowable communities.

Thus a discussion of the strength of Congress in the political system might profitably consider the ways in which the House and the Senate organize to do business, as a means of gaining insight into how a legislature can cope with the complex demands of a large heterogeneous society, including the rest of a big government. This may serve to throw some light on how or whether an effective legislature can contribute to democratic government.

An institutions, the House and the Senate differ markedly in their contemporary characters. The House is a highly specialized instrument for processing legislation. Its great strength is its firmly structured division of labor. This provides the House with a toehold in the policy-making process by virtue of its capacity to specialize and hence, in some collective sense, to provide for the mastery of technical details. House members are frequently better prepared than Senators in legislative conferences, and usually have the better grasp of the peculiarities of the executive agencies they supervise. This is a consequence of the strong division of labor that the House maintains: members are generally assigned to one or two committees only. Floor debate is normally limited to participation by committee members. There is an expectation that members will concentrate their energies rather than range widely over the full spectrum of public policy.

Patterns of news coverage encourage specialization. General pronouncements by House members are normally not widely reported. Senators, because they are fewer, more socially prominent, and serve longer terms (hence are around long enough for newsmen to cultivate) and allegedly serve "larger" districts, can draw attention to themselves by well-timed press releases almost regardless of their content. One result of all this publicity (among other things) is that the Senate is increasingly the home of presidential hopefuls, and this of course tends to generate still more Senate publicity. Some years ago I inquired of the chief of an important Washington new bureau if there was an imbalance between House

and Senate news coverage. His response (bowed/erized) was: "The House! Look at them! There's no presidential timber there at all."

The maintenance of a perennially timberless ecology like the House is difficult because it cannot entail excessive centralization of power. Decentralization of power is necessary for the House to sustain its capacity to cope with the outside world through its complex and specialized division of labor. The House's major career incentive is the opportunity accorded a tenth to a fifth of its members to possess the substance of power in the form of a committee or subcommittee chairmanship or membership on a key committee. At present seniority acts as a bulwark of this incentive system by guaranteeing a form of job security at least within the division of labor of the organization. Without decentralization of power there would quite likely be no incentive for able men to stay in the House; without able men (there are few enough of these at any rate) there would be no expertise. Without mastery of subject matter, initiatives taken and modifications made in public policy are capricious, responsive largely to prejudice, or ineffective, or failing that, detrimental.

The essence of the Senate is that it is a great forum, an echo chamber, a publicity machine. Thus "passing bills," which is central to the life of the House, is peripheral to the Senate. In the Senate the three central activities are cultivating national constituencies; formulating questions for debate and discussion on a national scale (especially in opposition to the President); and incubating new policy proposals that may at some future time find their way into legislation. Where the House of Representatives is a large, impersonal, and highly specialized machine for processing bills and overseeing the executive branch, the Senate is, in a way, a theatre where dramas—comedies and tragedies, soap operas and horse operas—are staged to enhance the careers of its members and to influence public policy by means of debate and public investigation.

In both the House and Senate the first commandment to newcomers is "specialize." But this means different things in each house. "Specialize" to a Representative means "tend to your knitting": work hard on the committee to which you are assigned, pursue the interests of your state and region. Consider, however, the consequences of these well-known features of Senate organization: Every Senator has several committee assignments. Boundaries between committees are not strictly observed. On the floor, quite unlike the House, virtually any Senator may speak for any length of time about anything. Thus the institution itself gives few cues and no compulsions to new Senators wondering what they should specialize in. For the Senate, specialization seems to mean finding a subject matter and a nationwide constituency interested in the subject that has not already been preempted by some more senior Senator.

It is a cliché of academic political science that, in legislative matters, it is the President who initiates policy, and Congress which responds, amplifying and modifying and rearranging elements that are essentially originated in the executive branch. Not much work has been done, however, on following this river of bills-becoming-and-not-becoming-laws back to its sources. Where do innovations in policy come from *before* the President "initiates" them?

It appears that a great many newly enacted policies have "been around," in

the air" for quite a while. In the heat of a presidential campaign or later, when a President wants a "new" program, desk drawers fly open all over Washington. Pet schemes are constantly being fished out, dusted off, and tried out on political leaders. There is often a hiatus of years, sometimes decades, between the first proposal of a policy innovation and its appearance as a presidential "initiative"—much less a law.

It is certainly not generally true that policy innovation begins with a presidential message to Congress. For behind each presidential message lurk months of man-hours of work and sometimes years of advocacy and controversy. The two great fountainheads of new policy seem to be, first, generally acknowledged "problems" producing the demands upon government that spur bureaucrats to ad hoc problem solving. This often later has to be codified or rationalized as "policy." Second, a longer range buildup in the society of something that is first not generally conceded to be a "problem." Those who see it that way may formulate demands upon the government in the guise of a "solution." This initiative may first be taken by a professor, or by staff professionals attached to an interest group, or by a government "expert." On rare occasions, experts attached to a Congressional committee will initiate a policy. More often, I think, Congress is in on the beginning of a policy innovation because it provides the first sympathy for an innovation concocted by outside experts.

Many of our most important policy innovations take years from initiation to enactment. Surely the idea of Medicare,* to take an obvious example, was not "initiated" by the Johnson administration in the 89th Congress. Proposals incorporating its main features had been part of the Washington landscape since the early Truman administration. Medicare, like other great policy innovations, required *incubation*, a process in which men of Congress often play very significant roles. Incubation entails keeping a proposal alive while it picks up support, or waits for a better climate, or while a consensus begins to form that the problem to which it is addressed exists. Senators and (to a lesser extent) Representatives contribute to incubation by proposing bills that they know will not pass, making speeches, making demands for data and for support from interest groups favoring the proposal. Sometimes a sympathetic committee chairman can be persuaded to allow hearings on such a proposal. This focuses public attention, mobilizes interest groups for and against, and provides an occasion for the airing of a proposal's technical justifications. Policy incubation is, of course, not exclusively a Congressional activity; lobbyists may plant stories in the press, organizations may pass resolutions, professors may write books and articles. Most major policy innovations have been incubated by methods such as these.

The net effect of the Congressional process of incubation in any event is to develop a sense of community among far-flung interest groups that favor the innovation by giving them occasional opportunities to come in and testify. It provides an incentive for persons favoring the innovation to maintain up-to-date information on its prospective benefits and technical feasibility. And it accustoms the uncommitted to a new idea.

* Medicare: see footnote on page 232.

Thus the Senate is in some respects at a crucial nerve end of the polity. It articulates, formulates, shapes, and publicizes demands for significant policy innovation. Proposals to increase the structuredness of the Senate, to force germaneness in debates, to tighten committee assignment procedures, and reduce the number of assignments per Senator, misunderstand the nature of the Senate and the contribution it uniquely makes to the political system. What is needed in the Senate is as little structure as possible; its organizational flexibility enables it to incubate policy innovations, to advocate, to respond, to launch its great debates, in short, to pursue the continuous renovation of American public policy through the hidden self-promotion of its members.

I do not mean by this to suggest that Congress is entirely self-sufficient in the policy-making process, or that all demands on Congress are equally well treated. Far from it. In order finally to make new policy, Congress generally does need the power of the Presidency to set priorities and focus the energy sufficient to mobilize the successive majorities that law-making requires. A presidential priority is a tremendous advantage in clearing away obstacles, but the President's support is usually purchased at a price: the proposal becomes his. This is not merely a matter of credit, although who gets credit is no trivial matter. It also affects the substance of policy. The executive branch begins the process of bargaining by including some features of a proposal and dropping others, adding bait here and padding there. In some cases (e.g., foreign aid, civil rights) executive branch control over bargaining is tight and continues right through the legislative mill. In others (e.g., surtax, Medicare) influential members of Congress establish which provisions will survive and which will be sacrificed. Sometimes (e.g., the bill establishing a Department of Housing and Urban Development in the Kennedy administration) the most significant battle is precisely over who will control the bill.

But even with the President behind a bill, and despite years of Congressional incubation, the mortality rate for "new" proposals is high. Most Congressional policy-making takes place under adversary circumstances. Thus Congressional decision-makers ordinarily cannot enjoy the luxury of examining alternative means to stipulated ends. In an adversary process ends are not stipulated but contested. Agreement on means is often sought as a substitute for agreement on ends. Ends are often scaled down, pulled out of shape, or otherwise transformed. In short, from the standpoint of an outsider who cares about one or more pressing problems in society, the Congressional process of policy-making looks chaotic at best, perversely insensitive at worst.

If the perception of chaos is largely an optical illusion, the perception of insensitivity may not be. Insensitivity, slowness to register some kinds of new demands, exists in Congressional policy-making and is not altogether curable. It can come about because the strength of a demand in society as it is felt by an outsider has no counterpart equally strong within the Congressional process itself. Sometimes Congress does not reflect "needs" as defined in the society at large because Congress is malapportioned, or because the "wrong" sorts of people dominate the relevant committees. In this fashion a wave of short-run, intense

tion. Given the stately metabolism (fixed terms of office, staggered Senatorial elections) decreed for it by the founding fathers, Congress could hardly be expected to operate efficiently with respect to short-run demands in the best of circumstances.

A second source of Congressional insensitivity to innovation is of course the fact that many urgent demands are pressed upon Congress by groups with whom Congressmen—and quite often the bulk of their constituents—simply disagree. Not all righteous causes are popular. And, as a matter of fact, not all momentarily popular causes are necessarily righteous. Congressmen often have a keen appreciation of this.

It may be said that Congressmen are more concerned than they should be with popularity. But this constraint on their judgment is the result of the fact that they are popularly elected. They must ask who will get the credit or the blame for public policies. They must know who is for what and how strongly, because these matters affect not only their own future efficacy but also the present chances that a majority can be assembled.

Is there a practical alternative to a process of legislative policy-making in which alternative policies are put to stringent tests of internal political acceptability? If the internal politics of the institution did not matter, the legislature would be a mere arena, a place for forces as they exist in the outside society to contend. The group that captures such an organization may find it marginally useful in pressing claims upon leaders situated elsewhere since victory in some arenas can give legitimacy to a cause. But as an organization develops independent power and internal structure at the same time that it begins to devote a portion of its resources to self-maintenance, it also develops a measure of insensitivity. To require total responsiveness of a legislature is to require it to be powerless.

Although Congress has developed institutional strength within its political system to a degree unrivaled by most contemporary legislatures, it does not follow that nothing can be done to increase its sensitivity to social problems, or increase its effectiveness within the logic of its own developing character. To me the reason most reform proposals are uninteresting is not because reforms are necessarily less appealing than the status quo, but because they are usually addressed rather arbitrarily to "needs," and typically neither needs nor solutions are discussed within the context that includes the relevant features of the ongoing system.

A number of meritorious reforms have been suggested that do not bear on the operations of the Congressional collectivity except insofar as the general reputations of all members are affected by the transgressions of a few. Reforms bearing on conflict of interest, disclosure of income, and other such matters do not materially affect the strength of the institution except as the institution's strength is mirrored in its general reputation.

Problems of Congressional morality cannot really be addressed responsibly without considering comparable problems in the private sector. Even under the new tax law American taxpayers will be giving rather substantial subsidies, far exceeding in their magnitude salaries and perquisites furnished Congress, to

banks. How relevant is it to condemn Congressmen for allegedly taking "junkets" at taxpayer expense while in the private sector all manner of extravagance is routinely charged off to "business expenses" as a tax dodge? When Congress recently voted to raise Congressional salaries the news media were generally outraged. The fact is, considering the weight of their responsibilities, even at the new rates, Congressmen are far from overcompensated. It is necessary for them to maintain out of pocket two bases of operation. Their campaign expenses are not deductible as business expenses. Consider, also, the compensation of men in positions of comparable responsibility in the private sector. I doubt that the top 535 men in the automotive industry, or on Wall Street, or in television make do with the equivalent of salaries of \$42,500 plus small change in the way of stationery allowances, inexpensive haircuts, a few overseas junkets, and occasional trips home on military aircraft.

All this provides no excuse for Congressmen not to bring themselves within the scope of the conflict-of-interest laws as they presently apply to political executives. This may be more technically difficult than it sounds, since like the everyday activities of the Secretary of the Treasury, their votes touch everything, so no investment of capital is immune to a conflict-of-interest problem. There are, however, enough violations of propriety to make the problem worth thinking about.

Important as these matters are for public morality, they do not touch the institutional life of Congress. I want to list three suggestions that are pertinent to the functioning of the collectivity. They embody changes in present arrangements, but do not disturb most existing institutional values except in ways I shall describe.

First, a scheme for mandatory retirement. Mortality is a melancholy fact, which comes upon us in different ways, and at different rates of speed. Most modern organizations protect themselves against its creeping effects by requiring the retirement of members after a certain age is reached. Congress now has a generous pension plan that works no economic hardship upon most members forced into retirement by electoral defeat. Instead of relying wholly upon local party systems to replace ailing, failing, and senile members, Congress should protect the efficiency and integrity of its functioning by providing for mandatory retirement at a stated age. If on college campuses these days thirty years of age seems about right for this purpose, perhaps for Congress the age seventy is suitable.

It will be argued in opposition to this proposal that many valuable persons make Congress their second career, and Congress would be depriving itself of much-needed maturity and good judgment in legislative affairs; that no similar impositions are contemplated for other political officers, and thus that the proposal is inequitable; and that the proposal places an unnecessary requirement upon electors in states and districts.

All three objections lack weight. The first ignores the extent to which Congress is presently a young man's game though, to be sure, a young man's waiting game. Men who arrive in Congress past the age of fifty-five rarely have a chance

proposal would over the short run, in fact, give some older new arrivals more of a chance to shine, since it would clear the most senior men out of the way at a predictable rate. But it would not materially affect the incentive system as it currently applies differentially to men of different ages.

The second objection, that the proposal is inequitable, has no merit with respect to the executive branch, since the President's term of office is strictly limited by other means, and other political officials serve at his pleasure. As for the judicial branch, I have no desire to reopen the issue of court packing, but neither have I any objection in principle to the imposition of mandatory retirement upon all federal judges.

Finally, there is the matter of the protection of the interests of voters. Presumably, if they want to send elderly Representatives and Senators to Congress, they should be allowed to do so. I merely assert a competing interest, one that has grown in importance over the years, namely the interest that Congress has as an institution in maintaining a membership sufficiently vigorous to conduct its increasingly demanding business successfully. Surely each Congressional district and each state contains more than one potential Congressman or Senator, so the disability the requirement of mandatory retirement places on the voters of each district must be regarded as minimal. A more impressive objection is that the proposal is unconstitutional. This was not fully apparent until the Supreme Court decided *Powell v. McCormack* last year, holding that Congressmen could be excluded from sitting only if they failed to meet qualifications specified in the Constitution. It now appears that it will take remarkable agility at textual construction by future courts or two-thirds votes by each House of Congress respectively to expel in individual cases, or a Constitutional amendment, in order to give effect to a general retirement scheme.

The second suggestion has to do with the improvement of technical knowledge available to Congress. Congress gets technical knowledge principally from committee staff personnel who make themselves knowledgeable in the subject matter coming before them. But while the executive branch has systematically been engaged in professionalizing its means of technical understanding over the past decade or more, Congress on the whole has not done so. It is romantic for Congressmen to think of themselves as not in need of expert and detailed explicit analysis because they are "generalists." Generalism is too often a genteel name for ignorance. The professionalization of economic forecasting and defense procurement in the executive branch led to tremendous increases in the power of political decision-makers to identify options and choose among them. This is precisely the capacity many Congressmen feel they are losing. And, if they choose to do so, they can professionalize their own committee staffs, thereby increasing the efficiency of their explicit analytical activities and enhancing their own knowledge and power.

To "professionalize" entails continuous contact with a community outside the world of Capitol Hill. Professional men—economists, operations researchers, psychologists, and so on—maintain standards of performance by knowing and participating in their professional communities. Typically, nowadays, the top economists of the executive branch—the men who formulate fiscal policy—

trust policy, international trade policy, and so forth—are first and foremost professional economists. Their loyalty to professional standards means (in general) that the options presented to political executives will be feasible and technically sound.

Typically, Congressional committees are staffed by means of an older, less effective process of patronage. This produces loyal service and, by the standards of an earlier day, highly competent service. But unswerving loyalty to the chairman is seldom enough to produce technically informed criticism of executive proposals, sophisticated insight into alternatives, or sensitive awareness of emerging problems in the world. Yet these are what Congress needs. Hence, two corrective proposals. Committees should be encouraged to constitute outside advisory groups to advise the chairman on the technical competence of the work the committee is receiving from its staff. Secondly, more extensive exchanges for one- or two-year hitchhikes of service should be instituted between Congressional committee staffs and comparable staff in the executive branch, private business, labor unions, social service organizations, and universities.

The purpose of these proposals is to bring to bear upon explicit policy analysis on Capitol Hill the standards—and the considerations—that are commonly employed in policy analysis within the executive branch and elsewhere in society. Steps such as these will not necessarily bring Congress into harmony with the executive branch in areas where they now disagree, since there is no reason to suppose that a large number of disagreements over national policy are based on ignorance—though some may be. These disagreements should be resolved. Other disagreements may occur if Congress chooses to equip itself with more professional analytic personnel, since not all executive branch proposals are free from controversy even when they are grounded in thorough professional knowledge. Thus more professionalism in explicit analysis can assist Congress in finding disagreements and weak spots in executive branch recommendations and can increase the probability that Congress itself can initiate policy. These proposals, therefore, genuinely attempt to strengthen Congress rather than to weaken it.

My third suggestion is a simple endorsement of Representative Morris Udall's* proposal to elect House committee chairmen at the start of each Congress. Udall's plan is not a return to king caucus. Rather, it provides for the selection of committee chairmen from a slate of the three most senior members of the majority party to be elected by secret ballot by all majority caucus members, with the ranking member on the minority side to be picked by a similar process in his caucus. This provides an institutional hedge against a too-arbitrary chairman, or one who is incapacitated or hopelessly out of step with his colleagues, without wholly vitiating the advantages of seniority or placing chairmanships in the hands of some centralized authority.

I have mentioned that the great advantage of the seniority system is that it decentralizes power in the House of Representatives by creating multiple centers of policy influence and increasing the number of good Congressional jobs. This

adds to the incentives of the Congressional career. Proposals to centralize power must always be weighed against the damage they may do to this incentive system. Effective legislatures in world history have been fragile and rare. In most places and at most times legislatures have been little more than arenas for the registering of organized group interests or electoral colleges for cabinets. The Udall plan has the advantage of even further decentralizing power—to Congressional party rank and file—rather than placing it in the hands of party leaders, and thus this plan increases the general level of incentives for House members to make careers in the House.

These proposals recognize that institutions must provide means by which they can respond to outside demands, yet at the same time retain the capacity to exercise independent choice. They recognize the peculiar contributions the House and the Senate make, individually and together, to American politics, and seek to enhance the participation of these institutions in the processes of policy-making by improving their capabilities rather than destroying their power.

*Morris K. Udall: Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Arizona (1961-1987). He is the author of *Education of a Congressman* (1972) and coauthor of *The Job of the Congressman* (1966).