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Congress: The Electoral Connection, Second Edition



Synopsis

In this second edition to a book that has now achieved canonical status, David R. Mayhew argues that the principal motivation of legislators is reelection and that the pursuit of this goal affects the way they behave and the way that they make public policy. In a new foreword for this edition, R. Douglas Arnold discusses why the book revolutionized the study of Congress and how it has stood the test of time. The book also contains a new preface by the author.

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Customer Reviews

Forget everything you learned in High School civics. David Mayhew utterly demolishes the idea that legislators are engaged in some high-minded pursuit of the "public interest," partisan ideological struggle, or that policies are adopted based on facts or reason. The Ur message of this thoroughly convincing but highly readable tome is that politicians, like the rest of us, pursue their own self interest. That interest is entirely dictated by the determination to get reelected at all costs. Positions are taken, votes are cast, and gestures are made with that first and foremost in mind. What does that mean? It means that well organized groups of voters (the much maligned but rarely understood "special interest groups") dictate policy. Our founding fathers called these groups "factions" and believed that they were the biggest threat to self government. They were right. Organized groups of politically active voters call the shots, and their agendas rarely comport with the public interest. Mayhew simply calls it as he sees it. He draws no conclusions, but they should be self evident to the reader. To understand democratic government, one must understand politics. And to

understand politics, one simply must read Mayhew. The book is also relevant beyond the realm of theory. Mayhew casts serious doubt upon the conventional belief that campaign finance reform, term limits, or a host of other proposed reforms will control the power of these factions. I've working in the public policy world in Washington for over a decade, and everything Mayhew argues comports well with my experience in dealing with elected officials and their staff members.

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