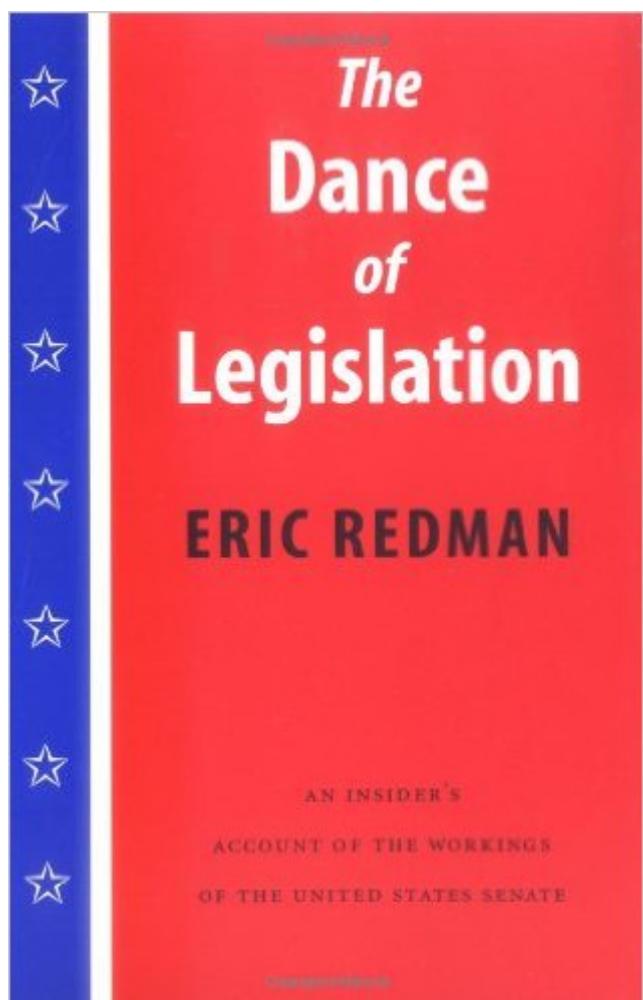


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The Dance Of Legislation: An Insider's Account Of The Workings Of The United States Senate



Synopsis

The Dance of Legislation has long been considered a classic description of the legislative process. In it, Eric Redman draws on his two years as a member of Senator Warren Magnuson's staff to trace the drafting and passing of a piece of legislation - S.4106, the National Health Service Bill - with all the maneuvers, plots, counterplots, frustrations, triumphs, and sheer work and dedication involved. He provides a vivid picture of the bureaucratic infighting, political prerogatives, and Congressional courtesies necessary to make something happen on Capitol Hill. In a Postscript to the 2000 edition, Redman reflects on how that process has, and has not, changed in the thirty years since the book was first published.

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Customer Reviews

This book deserves its reputation as a classic. Redman's story-telling skills are wonderful, he writes well, and clearly explains everything going on in the sometimes arcane world of legislative procedure. He makes the dullest-seeming motions and committee hearings come alive. Scholars of the Congress should read this, if for no other reason than to get a basic handle on how the Congress actually works, rather than how they think it works in fancy regression analyses. But more than that, it's the starting point for a whole genre of work such as Showdown at Gucci Culch, Conflict and Compromise, and The Bill (all of which are must-reads as well). Even a casual observer of politics can get excited and interested.

The year was 1970, President Nixon was still in office, however, an intern by the name of Eric Redman was on hand in the halls of Congress to witness the fascinating dance of legislation as The National Health Service Corps was attempting to be born. This book provides a personal account of the birth and struggles of the attempt to pass a piece of legislation from within the private confines of who was then the second most powerful United States Senator, Warren Magnuson from the State of Washington. While the names have changed, the struggle for a balance between power, influence, and social consciousness and survival remains the same. This book is as fantastic look behind the scenes of the most influential body of power on earth contains the essential ingredients today as a quarter of a century ago. It is a must read for anyone with an interest in political legislation and stands alone in its own right as a factual story that is as fascinating and compelling as any! fictional novel you will ever read.

If you ever wondered what it is like to work in the US Senate in the heyday of liberal politics, this is the best source that I know. A young guy of great talent (a Rhodes scholar, no less) is given a mandate from his boss to do whatever he can to create a program, essentially getting it written as an item into legislation. Though he rarely sees his boss, who is extremely busy with various machinations and political obligations, he takes the idea and runs with it on his own. In other words, he is delegated great power while in his early 20s. There is also a wonderful portrait of Sen. Magnuson, whose legacy extends to the present. This was in an era that is fundamentally different than the one we live in today: not only could things be created with relative ease, but because there was a deeper consensus in American politics at that time (i.e. both parties were trying to do things that they deemed good for the country and were willing to work together to do so). That means that Redman's experience has far less relevance to what passes for politics now. Today, in spite of the current administration's legislative accomplishments, what you get instead is symbolic posturing, ideological positioning that fails to consider in an honest way what the country needs, i.e. both parties refuse to see any merit in what the other party is proposing and hence votes almost purely on partisan lines. This trend developed the decade after Redman wrote this book in the 1970s, so I am by no means saying this is recent. In many ways, the contrast in the way politics was done then and now is the most valuable contribution of the book and great for any class on politics or for the interested layman. That is what makes this a classic that will live, however much it dates the book. It is also superbly written. Warmly recommended.

I was given this book as a young staffer at a lobbying firm in the mid 90's, and worked on and off of

the Hill until 2010. The Dance of Legislation is a good book about the legislative process, and the textbook ideas of how a law gets passed, but a lot has changed. There are more politics today in every decision, and many, many more competing interests. Another aspect not covered in the book is arrogance. Working with Congressional staffers today is far more tedious. Egos are bigger. Capitol Hill is a young persons game, where the average staffer is only 30 years old. Engaging with these bright, complex, often self absorbed and self obsessed people, can be very taxing, and require a certain skill. As much as the legislative process has stayed the same, the kind of people you are dealing with, the social, interpersonal, and political forces at work, are very different.

Very well written book - I had to buy it for one of my graduate courses for Public Health. Gives you a very good understanding of how legislation gets written, the interplay of politics in Washington, and the intimate details of how health care legislation has progressed in the past! After you finish reading it you will be amazed at what you learned! Highly recommend.

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