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Turf Wars: How Congressional Committees Claim Jurisdiction. / (book reviews)
By David C. King. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. 207p. \$34.00 cloth,
\$15.95 paper.

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In graduate school, I swore that I would NEVER, but NEVER, study two topics: urban services ("count manhole covers") and congressional committees. Having done both, I plead that things changed: Both were far more interesting than I thought, and both illuminated fundamental processes of governance while still remaining empirically tractable. David C. King's book will ensure that no graduate student will again swear not to study congressional committees, at least. He not only has produced a seminal work on the committee system but also has done it in a way that makes the whole process exciting and interesting to anyone with any interest at all in Congress.

I want to argue, however, that King's book is worthy of study not just by students of Congress or American national institutions. It ought to be examined generally by political scientists because of the processes of democratic governance that it illuminates. To make this case, I point to four reasons this is a critically important book on Congress.

First, Turf Wars is above all a study of the dynamics of jurisdictions. King argues that jurisdictions have both a statutory base (assigned by chamber rules - Rule X in the case of the House) and a common-law base (how the Office of the Parliamentarian refers bills to committees). Common law jurisdictions are necessary because the issues that face Congress are not fixed, and committee entrepreneurs have motive to claim new "property rights" as they emerge. As a consequence, committee jurisdictions are not fixed; they evolve in response to the

emergence of issues and the activities of congressional entrepreneurs. Most jurisdictional differences, King claims, occur when new issues emerge; there is very little conflict over established jurisdictions. But, viewing jurisdictional rules as "dynamic or adaptive documents" (p. 4) over extended periods means that great changes in jurisdictional arrangements occur. Moreover, statutory changes generally ratify already accomplished common-law alterations.

King goes on to detail the strategies that are more successful in influencing the referral of bills to committees. The discussion is not only a how-to manual for members of Congress but also illuminates the criteria used by the Parliamentarian in the referral process. The most successful strategies are directed at establishing either expertise (including interest and the willingness to commit resources) or the issue's jurisdictional proximity to the committee.

Second, *Turf Wars* is a historical and empirical study of the Office of the Parliamentarian. King's careful depiction of the House moving toward a nonpartisan officer making judgments about committee jurisdictions can give no aid and comfort to the party cartel model of Cox and McCubbins.

Third, King speaks to a major fault line in theorizing about Congress. Not content to stop with a superb analysis of jurisdictional dynamics among committees and the role of the Parliamentarian, King comments on current debate about the function of the committee system. Does it provide an "informationally efficient" mechanism for chamber majorities to understand the effect of policies, or does it establish a mechanism for reelection-driven legislators to enjoy "gains from trade" among policy specialist committees? King sees the committee system as a

collective good that can be undermined through member defection, which leads him to favor the informational viewpoint. While King's careful empirical study of the precursors of entrepreneurial activity on the new issue of mag-lev trains (chapter 6) supports the distributional model, the assignment of bills to committees seems more to conform to an informational efficiency ideal.

Fourth, the book is more than a study of Congress. It is an implicit (and occasionally explicit) argument about the evolution of governing institutions. Regardless of the "three theories of Congress" notion that permeates recent discussions, I claim that political scientists can no more have a theory of Congress than economists can have a theory of General Motors or astronomers

can have a theory of Jupiter. Surely, theory is more than this. What would a general theory of governance look like? King has laid out many of the elements of an evolutionary theory of institutional change, one whose context is the tractable problem of congressional committee jurisdictions. He is not as explicit here as on the other points I have summarized, but a reader does not have to strain to find it.

The key is King's view that jurisdictional rules are "adaptive documents" (p. 4). The following are some of his key findings that speak to an evolutionary approach.

- Reforms follow, rather than proceed, the incremental evolutionary process of jurisdictional change.
- Jurisdictions are path dependent.
- The office of the Parliamentarian evolved historically to "solve" the collective goods problem of maintaining a committee system; yet, the Senate was unable or unwilling to use the same depoliticized approach.
- Members of Congress are entrepreneurial when it comes to jurisdictional expansion; they have motive to use trial-and-error strategies to claim jurisdictional advantages.
- The Parliamentarian selects among strategies that fit the "weight of the bill" rule, which refers according to jurisdictional proximity and committee expertise.

If these findings are only slightly rephrased, the following picture emerges. Most change in social institutions is through a trial-and-error with selectivity process, resulting in considerable incrementalism and little intended comprehensive change. Once a system adopts a best strategy, from among the rivals it will not move to maximize - its solutions are path dependent. While some solutions are so attractive that all social institutions will converge on them (specialization and division of labor), others are not so uniformly attractive that convergence is so uniform (the House and Senate find different solutions to the bill referral problem). There must exist in evolutionary theory a source of variation (entrepreneurial legislators). There must exist a selection mechanism (the referral system).

The only problem I have with Turf Wars is that there is no need to try to distinguish between distributional or informational or party cartel models of committees (although a great deal of good comes from discussing the problem in these terms). Each of these depictions represents something important about Congress - because our national legislature is an adaptive organization facing competing demands. So long as an adaptive, evolving organization faces multiple demands, its solutions, as represented by its committee structure, will be an evolving compromise - albeit with different salient aspects in different eras (score one for Rhode).

David C. King has written the seminal work on the committee structure in Congress, a book that will be consulted as the standard work for years to come. It should be evident from this review that I think it is far more: Turf Wars is a template for the study of formal institutions in a complex society.