

The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · aps@psqonline.org · <http://www.psqonline.org>

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 126 · Number 3 · Fall 2011

No part of this article may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except:

- one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or
- with prior written permission of The Academy of Political Science.

Political Science Quarterly is published by The Academy of Political Science. Contact the Academy for further permission regarding the use of this work.

Political Science Quarterly
Copyright © 2011 by The Academy of Political Science. All rights reserved.

Health Care Reform and American Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know by Lawrence R. Jacobs and Theda Skocpol. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010. 232 pp. \$16.95.

This book offers a highly accessible, engagingly written account of the political struggles behind the enactment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The authors—two prominent experts on health care politics—provide a concise yet thorough overview of the roles played by the president, congressional leaders, voters, interest groups (ranging from the health care industry to grassroots organizations to Tea Partiers), and other key players in shaping this landmark piece of legislation. Noting that “it ain’t over ‘til it’s over” (p. 147), the authors then look ahead to the many political and legal challenges still facing the Affordable Care Act, tying in the crucial roles of the courts, the federal bureaucracy, and state government officials. The book also offers an elucidating overview of the Act’s distributive effects—trumpeting lower- and middle-class Americans as the big winners—as well as its (mostly positive) economic and budgetary implications.

Some of the book’s most interesting insights relate to the many puzzling political ironies of health reform. How did President Barack Obama—who during the 2008 Democratic primary offered health reform proposals that “seemed cautious and short of a commitment to try for universal coverage”—come to champion one of the most sweeping transformations of social policy in U.S. history (p. 32)? How is it that the health reform legislation incorporated “hundreds of amendments proposed by House and Senate Republicans” and that “many concrete ideas about how to expand access or control costs came from Republican sources”—and yet not a single Republican member voted for the legislation (p. 85)? How did the death of Democratic Senator and health reform champion Edward Kennedy and the election of Republican Scott Brown to replace him ultimately “deliver” health care reform for the Democrats (p. 103)? The authors skillfully explain these and other surprising twists and turns along the path to health care reform as reflections of specific aspects of electoral politics, interest group pressures, congressional procedures such as reconciliation and the filibuster, and other unique features of the American political process.

Another of the book’s strengths is its strong historical foundations. Drawing on their expertise in American political development, the authors highlight a number of interesting parallels between the Affordable Care Act and earlier attempts at reform. For instance, they argue that both proponents and opponents of reform developed political strategies based on lessons learned from the failure of the Clinton health care reform proposal in 1994 and, to a lesser extent, the repeal of the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act of 1988. The authors also compare the ongoing conservative backlash against the Affordable Care Act to early resistance to Medicare and Social Security—noting that “both remained politically controversial for some time after initial enactment” but eventually became “beloved

and indispensable to most American families”—suggesting that Affordable Care, too, may come to enjoy widespread public approval in time (p. 178).

Although the book’s journalistic style makes it highly readable, some may be disappointed that it does not take a more scholarly approach. Indeed, a quick perusal of the endnotes reveals that references to newspaper articles and blog entries greatly outnumber references to the political science literature. However, the book’s subtitle—*What Everyone Needs to Know*—hints that the breadth of the intended audience extends far beyond scholars of political science. As a widely accessible analysis of the politics of health care reform, this book makes an extremely useful and important contribution.

SHANNA ROSE
New York University

Constituency Representation in Congress: The View from Capitol Hill

by Kristina C. Miler. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
224 pp. \$85.00.

We get a handle on legislative behavior in several ways. Economic theories have flourished recently, but psychological models have always run a fair competition. Scholars at the University of Michigan, from Warren Miller and Donald Stokes down through John Kingdon and Richard Hall, have set the pace on this distinguished latter front.

Kristina Miler’s new work lies squarely in the Michigan tradition. It presents a “theory of legislative perception.” It calls on psychology to do that. Abounding are terms like “social cognition,” “operational codes,” “heuristics,” and “cognitive processes” (pp. 30, 38, 32, 31). In Miler’s analysis, how members of Congress see their districts is the key to an awful lot else. It is a perception thing. What the members see is what they are likely to represent. It can help explain which interests they speak for and vote for. Accordingly, we need to figure out why the members see the composition of their districts the way they do. Here, another analytic trope enters the discussion: Richard F. Fenno, Jr.’s idea that members see a multiplicity of groups or interests when they visualize their districts—not just one, or not just the median voter. Miler picks up this Fenno idea and runs with it by considering “subconstituencies” in the congressional districts.

All this is done with admirable skill and sophistication, and it is presented with economy and clarity. The book is an accomplished statement that should have an audience. Miler interviewed staffers in 81 House offices during 2001–02, quizzing them about enactments in the areas of health and energy policy. A basic question trolling for perceptions of their bosses’ districts, which allowed open-ended answers, was: “Who in the district is it [this bill] important to (p. 172)?” Suitable codings to this and other questions ensued. Well-planned equations could then result. On the basis of the staffer reports, we are told, for example, that interests that contacted the congressional