

## Foreword



On July 24, 1989, the Committee on Ways and Means celebrates its bicentennial. The Committee on Ways and Means is the oldest committee of the Congress. Its history is a large part of our nation's history. The responsibilities vested in the committee have placed it at the center of some of the most critical legislative decisions faced by the Congress.

The prestige accorded the committee is due in part, of course, to the breadth of its legislative jurisdiction: all revenues, the management of the public debt, tariff and trade laws, the Social Security and Medicare systems. These responsibilities alone would make it a committee of note. But just as important to its reputation has been the manner in which the members of the committee have exercised those responsibilities.

On the occasion of this two hundredth anniversary of the committee, I hope readers will forgive me for some self-indulgence, but I think this history is fascinating. And I hope that historians, political scientists, students, and citizens who just want to know a little more about this country of ours will read this book and feel the same way. But more important, I hope that we can learn from this impressive story. History is of little value if we do not derive from it some lessons for the future.

One lesson to be learned is the importance to sound government of the legislative process itself. I am frequently described as being as much interested in the process as I am in the substance of legislation. Well, it's true, and the reason is simple: the process affects the substance. Time and time again, we have seen that the principle of majority rule, combined with the procedures and precedents that allow for all views to be heard and considered, is the purest way to produce good law.

Reasonable people can differ over any number of policies. This history details many of these differences. The wonder of our legislative system is that such differences are aired in free, open, and often spirited debates. The legislative process at its best is inclusive, not exclusive. It strives to assure that all points of view, all interests, are heard. The results, while never perfect, benefit from this exchange of views. Our legislative efforts would be futile if they did not enjoy respect, and that respect is best guaranteed through a decision-making process that is fair and open.

Another lesson from this history is that while no member can or

should ignore his constituency, the process of legislating should encourage and assist representatives in rising above purely parochial interests.

One cannot read the history of the Committee on Ways and Means without recognizing the important role played by certain individuals at critical points in our nation's history. The history of the committee is replete with examples of legislators who, through the strength of their convictions, were able to lead the country in a direction it might not otherwise have gone. Examples include Gallatin, Randolph, Stevens, Underwood, Hull, Doughton, and Mills.

I believe that the greatness of the Committee on Ways and Means lies in the fact that regardless of the issue, throughout its history, the representatives on the committee have sought not only to serve their constituents, but also to serve the national interest. This commitment will be sorely tested in the years to come.

Today we face enormous and seemingly permanent budget deficits the likes of which have never been seen in our history. This generation's unwillingness to pay for the government it demands means that future generations will be saddled with an intolerable debt burden. This situation did not begin in the 1980s, but it has increased dramatically during this period.

What is disturbing is not so much the size of the debt; significant debts have accumulated in the past, especially in times of war. Much more troubling is our seeming inability to even debate, much less decide, on those changes necessary to reduce or eliminate the oppressive budget deficit. However, in the end it must be done or our nation will suffer the consequences.

One can only wonder if this is not one of those critical periods when it is necessary to look beyond narrow parochial interest, a time when strong leadership is required. The future of our children and their children depends upon the leadership we exert today. Perhaps this history can provide some guidance to meeting today's challenges. I sincerely hope so.

This work is the product of countless hours by numerous individuals. Those who read and enjoy these pages should be grateful to all of them. First and foremost is Fred Schwengel, President of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society. Fred's vision of all committees of the Congress having their own written history led to a cooperative arrangement with the Committee on Ways and Means in order to celebrate its bicentennial. This work is the latest of Fred's contributions to our greater knowledge and appreciation of the history of Congress.

Donald R. Kennon and Rebecca M. Rogers of the Capitol Historical Society, the authors of the work, are to be congratulated. They were able to research, analyze, and write the history of the Committee on Ways and Means in an interesting, informative, and scholarly manner, facing the deadline of the committee's bicentennial. Students

of congressional history and those of us associated with the Committee on Ways and Means are indebted to them for their hard work and scholarly commitment.

A large debt of gratitude is also owed to the five individuals who served as the advisory board for this work: Dr. Richard Baker, Historian, Senate Historical Office; Dr. Charles O. Jones, Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin; Mr. Fred Pauls, Chief of Government Division, Congressional Research Service; Dr. Robert Peabody, Professor of Political Science, Johns Hopkins University; and Dr. Raymond Smock, Historian, Office of the Bicentennial. The members of the advisory board contributed generously of their time and made valuable suggestions as the work proceeded. It is fair to say that the success of this work is in large measure due to their involvement. In addition, Judy Schneider of the Congressional Research Service devoted countless hours in assisting in this project and deserves a special note of appreciation.

I would also like to thank those persons in government agencies such as the National Archives, the Department of the Treasury, the Internal Revenue Service, the Congressional Research Service, and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol who have given freely of their time and efforts. They have also contributed greatly and often anonymously to the success of this work.

A special thanks is extended to Charles M. Brain, Assistant Staff Director of the Committee on Ways and Means, who first approached me with the idea of a written history of the committee in celebration of the bicentennial and who coordinated the efforts of all of the contributors.

Finally, each member of the Committee on Ways and Means must thank all those committee members who have served before them. We have been entrusted with a precious legacy. We must resolve to pass it to future members of the committee with its pride, dedication, tradition of excellence, and willingness to confront the difficult issues of the day intact and untarnished.



Dan Rostenkowski, *Chairman*